

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly **worker**



**So it's July 4: support left candidates where you can, vote Labour where you must**

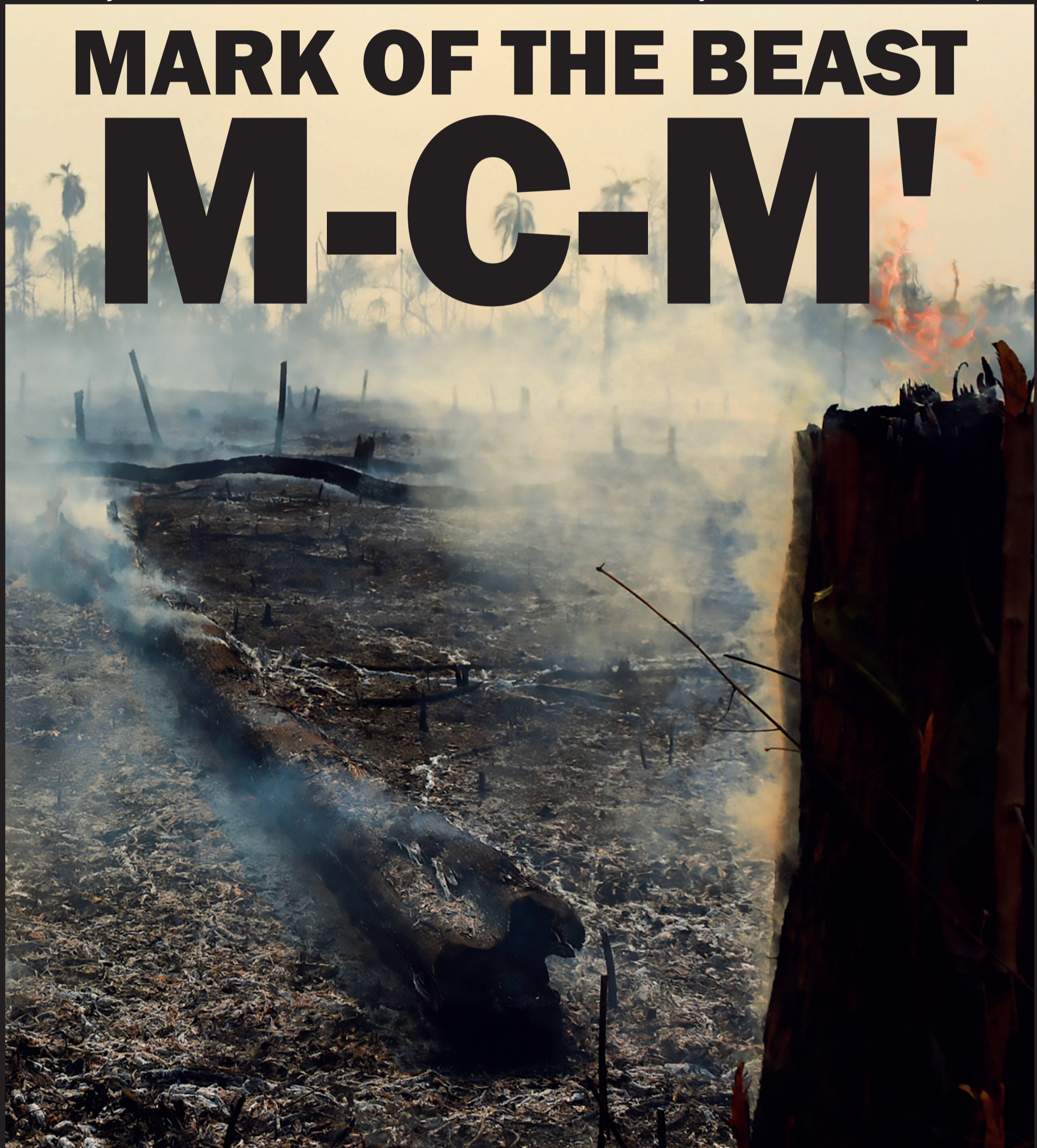
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# MARK OF THE BEAST M-C-M'



## LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

## Working class

Congratulations to Moshé Machover for pointing out an all-important truth about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: "The overthrow of Zionism is only possible with the participation of the Israeli working class" (as quoted by Steve Freeman in his article, 'Marching towards what solution?', May 19).

Quite right: the more reactionary groups like Hamas attack Israelis *qua* Israelis, the more firmly they unite the Israeli proletariat and bourgeoisie. This goes not only for Jews, but for Arabs too, who comprise roughly 20% of the Israeli working class. Four years ago, Jews and Arabs were fighting in the streets of Acre. A month after October 7, which targeted both groups equally, polls found that support for the Jewish state was running at 70% among the former, a 20-year high (*Times of Israel* November 11). Instead of weakening the Zionist state, all Hamas succeeded in doing was binding together the disparate parts all the more firmly. Socialism, needless to say, seeks the opposite, which is to internationalise the conflict by uniting Israeli and Palestinian workers and turning them both against Zionism and the equally reactionary misleaders of Hamas.

So it's good that someone finally spoke up for united working class action. But there's a problem. Machover is also a supporter of boycott, divestment and sanctions - a movement that includes Hamas in its leadership and whose prime goal is to disemploy Israeli workers, Jewish or Arab, by persuading imperialism to withdraw investment. Does Machover believe that the best way to organise Israeli proletarians is by throwing them out of work? Does he expect Israeli workers to rally behind forces that are trying to destroy them?

At least Tony Greenstein is consistent. He regards Israeli workers as "the most reactionary" component of Israeli society and therefore doesn't care what happens to them. This is why he has distinguished himself (if that's the right word) as an unabashed Hamas apologist since October 7. But Machover wants to have his cake and eat it too by supporting Israeli workers, while at the same time lining up with their class enemies.

Perhaps he'll explain at his next public appearance how he proposes to resolve this contradiction.

**Daniel Lazare**  
New York

## Solidarity

On May 13, students in Athens joined the global movement of the

student intifada in solidarity with Palestine and occupied the Athens Law School. They demanded that Greek universities stop all cooperation in the form of research projects or exchange and funding programmes with the Israeli state. The next morning, police raided the occupied space and arrested 28 people. They confiscated a number of items from the grounds of the university, with no existing evidence to relate these items to any of the arrested individuals.

After the finalisation of the law enabling Greek police presence within the university campuses last year, there were unleashed waves of violence against students on their own campuses, while this year has seen a fast-tracked path to the privatisation of universities. Increased police presence and intimidation tactics in once free and autonomous spaces extend beyond the university walls. Events, activities and collective gatherings in public spaces - whether political or not - are targeted by police repression and violence. The state's aggressive stance is an attempt to quash any form of anti-capitalist solidarity with migrants in support of free movement.

The 28 arrested in the Athens Law School were immediately transferred to the central police station (the Gada). Lawyers were only allowed access to them eight hours after their detention, with the police attempting to force detainees to provide fingerprints prior to the arrival of their lawyers. In the meanwhile, hundreds of solidarians gathered in front of the Gada, demanding the immediate release of those arrested, while affirming their support for a free Palestine.

The following day, solidarians were present at the court to show their support for those arrested, with chants for a free Palestine and an end to the intimidation tactics. Finally, the 28 were released and the hearing postponed until May 28 of those accused of vandalism, disruption of the public order, refusal to cooperate with police procedures and possession of "weapons". In spite of the decision to release all detainees, the state security department registered the nine non-Greek international comrades as "unwanted" and decided to continue their detention. Their lawyers were then informed that a deportation order would be issued - an unprecedented development for European citizens.

Administrative detention and deportations are part of the strategy that the Greek state practises as one of the deeply racist components of the murderous Fortress Europe. The state's blatant racism is evident in the massive number of arrests, detentions, torture and deportations that happen on a daily basis - and mostly go unnoticed by society.

The brazenness with which the Greek state acts is also explained by years of enacting a deadly border policy against refugees, migrants and undocumented people. There are four grounds for administrative deportation, which give the police complete freedom to judge whether a person is a threat to public order, and people can be detained without trial and deported. The detention and threatened deportation of the nine detainees - from Italy, Spain, France, Germany and Britain - is a new application of these repressive orders targeting the solidarity movement with Palestine.

The technology used by the Greek state in its violent and deadly pushbacks of asylum-seekers rely on research and technologies of containment, surveillance and control that the Israeli state tests on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Opposition to the Israeli state, its military occupation of Palestine and the wars it wages in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, is a 'threat' to the EU and to Greece's military border security complex.

The rightwing media released information about the detention and deportation of the nine individuals before any of them or their lawyers were informed - a move that underscores the state's use of the media as a tool for psychological warfare.

Migrants and those without papers who exercise their right to free speech by being politically active, are now under increased risk of deportation and other legal action. This is exemplified in the case of our Egyptian comrade who, having attended pro-Palestine demonstrations, has been threatened with deportation by the Egyptian embassy. Governments and media outlets collaborate to criminalise and delegitimise efforts to support the Palestinian struggle, portraying individuals as a threat to national security.

These actions reveal the state's desperation to maintain control and suppress resistance. It underscores the need for alternative media and solidarity networks to counteract these intimidation tactics. By standing in solidarity with those targeted, we can expose the state's oppressive mechanisms and continue the struggle for true liberation - for Palestinians and those incarcerated. There is a need to escalate our solidarity, to say clearly and loudly that neither intimidation nor imprisonment and deportation will stop the struggle. Resistance will never die, Palestine will never die!

We demand:

- The immediate release of the nine international detainees.
- No to their deportation.
- The abolition of administrative detention for all migrants and asylum-seekers.

**Migrants Solidarity**  
Athens

## Free him

On April 25, Bogdan Syrotiuk - a socialist opponent of both the fascistic Zelensky regime and the Nato-instigated Ukraine-Russia war - was arrested by the security service of Ukraine.

Bogdan, who is 25 years old and in poor health, is being held in a prison under atrocious conditions on fraudulent charges of serving the interests of Russia. In fact, he is an intransigent opponent of the capitalist Putin regime and its

invasion of Ukraine. He fights for the unity of the working class in Ukraine, Russia and throughout the former Soviet Union. If found guilty of these charges by a kangaroo court, Bogdan is threatened with a prison sentence of 15 years to life, which is equivalent to a death sentence.

His arrest is the latest example of the Zelensky regime's brutal repression of leftwing movements, whose opposition to the war is finding a growing response within the Ukrainian working class. The international committee of the Fourth International and the World Socialist Web Site call for a global campaign to demand the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk. The fight for his freedom is an essential component of the struggle against imperialist war, genocide and fascism.

Please sign the petition at [www.change.org/p/free-bogdan-syrotiuk-ukrainian-socialist-and-opponent-of-nato-s-proxy-war](http://www.change.org/p/free-bogdan-syrotiuk-ukrainian-socialist-and-opponent-of-nato-s-proxy-war).

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Made a start?

On May 15, I was at the immensely heartening Zoom event with former Labour mayor for the North East Combined Authority, Jamie Driscoll, about where to go after having achieved the second highest vote for an independent in British electoral history in this month's local elections. The next day, I was in Newcastle with Chris Williamson for the first public meeting to have been organised in the North East by the Workers Party of Britain. Again, it was all very optimistic. Things are moving.

It is public knowledge that Jamie is looking to stand, with other independents, in the general election, while the Workers Party has selected six candidates in the North East. The party should insist on support for those candidates, possibly in return for endorsing Jamie's independents elsewhere in the North East Metro area - all the while reminding him that it had supported him for mayor.

Jamie may also endorse candidates of other parties that supported him this year, such as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Transform, but the Workers Party needs to be clear that any deal with him would entail his support of all of its candidates even against any of those others, since it alone is an existing parliamentary party, with an MP elected.

I have no plan to join the Workers Party, although I would not expect to stand against it. If, however, it did not contest North Durham, then I would. To strengthen families and communities by securing economic equality and international peace through the democratic political control of the means to those ends, including national and parliamentary sovereignty, we need to hold the balance of power.

Owing nothing to either main party, we must be open to the better offer. There does, however, need to be a better offer, not a 'lesser evil' (which in any case the Labour Party is not).

We have made a start.

**David Lindsay**  
Lanchester

## Cheap books

The annual International Rare Book Fair has just closed its doors at the Saatchi Gallery in London.

A handful of items stand out, not least a beautifully bound first edition of Charles Darwin's *On the origin of the species*, selling for £100,000! This figure is at the upper end of the booksellers' offers - except, of course, for Karl Marx. Invariably, whenever a book authored by Marx is displayed, its price is in an entirely different league.

This year's most notable offer is a small, slender book, written in German but published in Belgium in 1848: *The Communist Party manifesto*, which is attributed to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and is one of 27 known copies. The price? £1,750,000!

**Paul Russell**  
email

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday May 26 5pm

**A week in politics - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion**

Use this link to join meeting:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at [Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

## Communist University

Saturday August 3 to Saturday August 10 (inclusive)

International Student House, 229 Great Portland Street, London W1  
(nearest tube: Great Portland Street)

Cost: Full week, including accommodation in en suite rooms: £250  
(£150 unwaged). Solidarity price: £300.

First/final weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30).  
Full day: £10 (£5). Single session: £5 (£3).

Make payments to account 'Weekly Worker'. Account number: 00744310.  
Sort code: 30-99-64. Please quote payment reference 'CU2024'

Email your booking, stating single or double room, to: [office@cpgb.org.uk](mailto:office@cpgb.org.uk)

## ELECTION

# So it's July 4

Rishi Sunak has gambled on falling inflation, tepid economic growth and Rwanda flights to win this summer's general election. **Carla Roberts** says: while the Tories richly deserve to lose, we should do nothing to foster illusions in Sir Keir

**D**espite his party trailing 20 points in the polls, Rishi Sunak has called a surprise general election. After 14 years of Conservative-led government, Labour is widely expected to win. Of course, it could all go horribly wrong for Sir Keir Starmer, as it did for Theresa May in 2017. However, while there are a few talkative sages on the left who are determined to go against the grain and display their brilliance, or maybe just their stupidity, by predicting a Tory victory, this seems highly unlikely.

Sunak's general election campaign got off to a dreadful start. As he was speaking outside No10 Downing Street from his lectern, the heavens opened and he was drenched to the skin. To make matters worse, the semi-professional anti-Brexit protester, Steve Bray, played New Labour's anthem, D:Ream's 'Things can only get better', from just outside the gates on Downing Street. The prime minister plodded on and on with his pre-prepared script, but with helicopters whirring above he was barely audible.

### Skilled

A skillful speaker such as Boris Johnson would have referenced the downpour and the booming music. But Sunak is not a skilful speaker. He did, though, come across as somewhat pathetic - a figure of fun, a loser. Having delivered his claims about inflation being back under control and the economy being set to improve, he scurried back into No10 ... and perhaps cursed the gods for being so unkind to him.

Rumours of a pending general election had been swirling around Westminster and the media all day. His gamble triggered speculation that Tory MPs were submitting no-confidence letters to Sir Graham Brady, chair of the backbench 1922 committee. Those who have not already announced that they are stepping down from the Commons come a general election obviously fear a drubbing and losing their precious seats. Even those who manage to hang on will lose the lucrative opportunities that come with sitting on the government benches.

The general assumption had been of an October election ... after Jeremy Hunt had delivered his autumn statement along with another cut in taxes, national insurance or whatever. However, despite lower inflation and a projected 0.7% growth in the UK, exceeding Germany and the US, it is clear that the general perception amongst the population is that wage levels, rents, mortgage repayments, tax levels, national debt, the NHS and other public services are all grim and expected to get grimmer still: 'Things can only get worse'.

So he went for broke.

After Sunak's rain-sodden announcement, Starmer delivered what was for him a slick speech, saying it was "time for change" and warning that five more years of the Tories would mean yet more muddle, chaos and incompetence. His unique selling point is that, having transformed Labour - ie, purged the left - his government will reverse national decline, restore public services and transform the UK. And, in a coded message to the City, big business and international allies, he

concluded with his "Country first, party second, always" slogan. In other words, he will put the interests of capital first, the working class always second.

What of the left?

It is now only a matter of time until Jeremy Corbyn announces that he is standing in Islington North. This will allow Sir Keir to finally rid himself of his troublesome former leader. Corbyn, was, of course, suspended in 2020 over his insufficiently grovelling response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission report into so-called anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. However, he was restored to party membership the following month, but not let back into the Parliamentary Labour Party. As soon as he shows his hand, Corbyn will be automatically expelled from the Labour Party. Its rules forbid anyone standing or supporting a candidate standing against the official Labour candidate.

The application process for the Labour ticket in Islington North has now closed and, unsurprisingly, only 'no names' seem to have applied.<sup>1</sup> After all, they are standing to lose. The most recognisable is Paul Mason, the pro-Ukrainian former BBC journalist and ex-member of the Trotskyist sect, Workers Power, who has become a state asset in the real sense of the word: in 2020 he produced a ridiculous map entitled 'Network of influence', where he drew often bizarre connections between the Kremlin and leftwing groups, young Labour officials and 'the black community'. In leaked emails, Mason wrote that he had forwarded it to the head of the foreign office's 'counter-disinformation unit' (who probably threw it in the bin!).<sup>2</sup>

Corbyn is a well respected local MP and has built up a thumping majority since 1983. Many expect him to trounce his 'official' Labour opponent. We certainly hope so, especially if it is the renegade Mason.

Corbyn will be supported by the new organisation, Collective, which last week published a list of around 120 candidates it backs, most of whom will be standing as 'independents'. The list also includes two candidates of SPEW's electoral front, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and six candidates of George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain (which is standing many more).

Collective is a strange outfit - and it is getting stranger by the day. It has very little to offer, when it comes to a political programme. The call for an "immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza" is tacked onto the five lame demands of Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project: a real pay rise, a green new deal, housing for the many, tax the rich to save the NHS, and welcome refugees in a world free from war.<sup>3</sup>

No doubt Jeremy Corbyn has a hand in Collective, but he is keeping it quiet for now. Plus, it seems that he does not want to be associated with any particular group or party during the general election campaign, so as not to damage his chances.

Among the six groups that Collective is "in solidarity with", we now find Just Stop Oil and its 'political arm', Assemble. The other groups are Transform (stillborn in November 2023<sup>4</sup>), Ken Loach's equally 'energetic' For the Many

Network, the Liverpool Community Independents of ex-Momentum honcho Alan Gibbons and the very odd, Midlands-based 'party', Reliance, which wants a "real political alliance with the people" (?) and declares that its candidates are "free from the constraints of party politics, allowing them to truly represent the interests of the people in their communities".<sup>5</sup> "Free" and therefore unaccountable.

But it is Roger Hallam who seems to play an increasingly big role in Collective. The organisers probably hope that his 'fame' among climate activists will open up the organisation to potentially tens of thousands of politically motivated young people. But Hallam is a very loose cannon and comes with plenty of baggage - and a firm hatred of party politics and the boring matter of democratic and transparent decision-making. "Enough of political parties and broken politics: let's assemble ourselves!", states Assemble's excitable website.

### Vote for who?

So who to campaign for? Who to vote for?

There most certainly should not be a blanket Labour vote. Auto-Labourism is the politics of bankruptcy that we can and should leave to the social-imperialists.

We say: campaign for the most viable left candidate. Eg, Jeremy Corbyn in Islington North and George Galloway in Rochdale. In certain cases it might be the most principled candidate (a relative concept, admittedly). Almost without exception the left candidates on offer are god damn awful when it comes to anything approaching principled politics.

Not that we should rule out voting Labour. In a straight fight between a Labour candidate and a Tory, Lib Dem, Green, Scot nat, Reform, etc, candidate, go for Labour, not because of the candidate, who almost without exception will stink to high heaven of self-serving careerism. No, vote Labour in such circumstances, because Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party. In other words, cast a class vote.

We should consider *campaigning* for what little remains of the Labour left ... but conditionally. Will this or that member of the so-called Socialist Campaign Group, or Momentum, or whatever, publicly call for the end of UK arms supplies to Israel? Will they publicly demand the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza? Will they publicly condemn Sir Keir and the Labour front bench for their effective complicity in Israeli genocide?

If the answer is an emphatic yes, yes and yes, to each question, then such a candidate deserves support. We ought to campaign for them and do all we can to get them elected on July 4. A victory for such a candidate would indeed be a cause for celebration ●

### Notes

1. labourlist.org/2024/05/jeremy-corbyn-islington-north-labour-selection-process-general-election.
2. thegrayzone.com/2022/06/07/paul-masons-covert-intelligence-grayzone.
3. thecorbynproject.com/demands.
4. See *Weekly Worker* November 30 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1469/sixty-seconds-and-no-politics.
5. reliance.vote.

## ACTION

### Stop the genocide in Gaza, stop arming Israel

**Saturday May 25:** Local actions for Palestine. Israel's genocidal assault in Gaza has killed over 35,000 Palestinians, and displaced the vast majority of the population. Palestinians in Gaza now face imminent famine. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

### Woolwich march and rally for Gaza

**Saturday May 25, 1.30pm:** Assemble by Greenwich Islamic Centre, 131 Plumstead Road, London SE18. Ceasefire now. Stop arming Israel. Organised by Greenwich Stop the War and Greenwich Palestine Action: stopwar.org.uk/events/woolwich-march-rally-stop-arming-israel.

### Israelism

**Tuesday May 28, 7.30pm:** Film screening, followed by discussion led by Na'amod, Cultplex, 50 Red Bank, Manchester M4. The film reveals a generational divide among US Jews, as more question the narratives their synagogues and teachers fed them as children. Tickets: pay what you can to raise money for Medical Aid for Palestinians. Organised by Cultplex: cultplex.eventive.org/schedule/66422860b9fff700a849b30d.

### A walk through radical Clerkenwell

**Thursday May 30, 6.30pm:** Assemble at Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. David Rosenberg leads a stroll through the streets of Clerkenwell. Ticket required (free). Includes light refreshments and a display on local radical history. Organised by Marx Memorial Library and Islington Council: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/463.

### Communist Culture Club

**Thursday May 30, 7pm:** Fortnightly online meeting. 'Sport and leisure under capitalism' - Peter Kennedy. 'Their sport and ours' - John Reid. 'The workers' Olympics: a real alternative?' - Ben Lewis. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

### Stop fascist Tommy Robinson in London

**Saturday June 1:** Counterdemonstration, The Strand, London WC2. Oppose far-right groups led by Tommy Robinson, who are planning to march against migrants. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=776533081257764.

### Mature capitalism

**Thursday June 6, 7pm:** Online session in the fortnightly 'ABC of Marxism' course, presented by Ian Spencer. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

### Derby Silk Mill festival

**Saturday June 8, 10.15am to 4.30pm:** March, rally and free festival. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1 and march to Cathedral Green. Celebrate Derby's historic general strike (1833-34). Speakers include Kevin Horne (Orgreave Campaign), Matt Wrack (FBU) and Fran Heathcote (PCS). Organised by Derby Silk Mill Rally: www.facebook.com/DerbySilkMillRally.

### War, peace and Palestine - trade union issues

**Saturday June 8, 10.30am to 4.30pm:** Trade union conference, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. Facing up to the warmongers and sharing experiences of building pro-Palestine initiatives in unions and workplaces. Tickets £10. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

### Restore the people's NHS

**Saturday June 22, 10am to 5pm:** Launch conference, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. Hear from activists, health workers, and experts about fighting for a full restoration of the founding principles of the NHS. Registration £10 (£5). Organised by Keep Our NHS Public/Health Campaigns Together: www.facebook.com/events/789812619952647.

### Tories out - fight for a workers' manifesto

**Saturday June 22, 11am to 4.30pm:** Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. An opportunity for union reps, members and activists to share experiences from struggles and to set out the programme needed for the general election. Registration £8. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/events/2164260670591261.

### Jarrow rebel town festival

**Saturday June 22, 11am:** Parade. Assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Led by Felling Silver Band. Speakers include Arthur Scargill, Kate Osbourne MP and David Douglass. Followed by stalls and music at The Crown and Anchor, Chapel Road, Jarrow NE32. Organised by Jarrow Rebel Town Festival and Seven Lads of Jarrow: ourjarrow.wordpress.com.

### Restore nature now

**Saturday June 22, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble Park Lane, London W1. March to Parliament Square for rally and entertainment. One in six species in Britain are at risk of extinction. The nature and climate emergencies demand urgent political action. Organised by Restore Nature Now: www.restorenaturenow.com.

### Stop the deportations, stop Rwanda

**Saturday June 29, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble outside Unite House, 99 New Road, Hayes UB3. March to Colnbrook Detention Centre. Stop the snatch squads, close the detention camps. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: www.facebook.com/events/806604534399911.

### CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

**SWP**

# Regrets, they've had a few

Why has the SWP issued a public statement on its 2013 rape scandal? Paul Demarty looks at the record and searches for answers

Quite out of the blue, the Socialist Workers Party has issued a press release on its mishandling of rape and sexual harassment allegations in 2013.<sup>1</sup>

It is not clear what has led the SWP to make this move. Certainly the statement does not shed any light on the matter, though unspecified "accusations of 'rape apologetics'" are mentioned. The comrades are, of course, busy little bees at the moment, enthusiastically participating in the mass movement against the Gaza war, as well they might be. They are presumably recruiting this way. Perhaps prospective members are raising this as an obstacle to joining; but then, by retreading this territory, they risk giving it wider publicity, when one has rather got the impression over the years that they would prefer never again to speak of the whole sorry episode.

Publicly addressing this question at all is, thus, in some sense admirable. The SWP at least acknowledges that it screwed up, and offers some reasons to suppose that it will not do so again. Unfortunately, what it acknowledges is only a very partial list of the sins committed; and the reasons offered are not so reassuring on closer examination. In fact, these two points are connected. What do they think happened?

The case involved a woman alleging rape by someone who was then a member of the elected leadership of the party. A second woman also came forward to allege sexual harassment by the same member of the leadership. The women making the allegations chose not to take them to the police ... given the lack of seriousness with which the police treat such cases. Instead, they sought to pursue their allegations through the party's 'disputes committee' [DC].

This leading member was Martin Smith, then national organiser and *de facto* top dog. This was a serious matter for the overall leadership. But "the process we had in place at that time was entirely inadequate and we handled the two cases badly". The DC panel examining the case "contained people who had worked closely with the person accused". It "sought to pass judgement on matters of fact about which it could not meaningfully establish the truth". Furthermore,

Our 2013 procedures were also insufficiently mindful of or sensitive to the challenges women face when they bring forward serious accusations of sexual misconduct. They also did not do enough to acknowledge potential imbalances of power due to gender, seniority in an organisation and age differences.

That is more or less all the statement has to say about the actual events. We then move on to apologies:

We are sorry for failing the two women. We also apologise to all those in the wider movement who, like us, consider women's oppression in general, and rape in particular, to be abhorrent, including former members of the SWP who supported the two women.



Accused of being rape apologists

That reference to "former members of the SWP" is the only hint of the internal crisis that all this unleashed. It is the most spectacular omission in a very partial account, and we will get to that in a moment.

However, we need to start at the beginning. As we noted, Smith was briefly national organiser, effectively leading the SWP in day-to-day matters after the old leadership around John Rees and Lindsey German was sidelined (their supporters later broke away to form Counterfire). This all took place in 2007-09, and coincided with the outbreak of the global financial crisis, from which the SWP, like most far-left groups, expected to draw renewed energy and purpose, and balloon in size.

## Swerp anon

The reality was stagnation, and within a couple of years it was Smith's turn to be demoted. At around this time - 2009 or 2010 - allegations of sexual harassment were circulated anonymously against him, including to the *Weekly Worker*. We chose not to publish, having no way to verify the claims and supposing them to be part of the 'knives out for Martin' court politics then ongoing. Smith did, however, address them at an SWP conference in what witnesses described as an incomprehensible, elliptical speech, after which somebody in the crowd got up a "The workers united will never be defeated!" chant, and the whole affair was presumed to be put to bed.

It was late in 2012 when the whole thing started to unravel. The complainant had re-examined her own memories of her interactions with Smith, and come to the conclusion that she had been the victim of rape. The DC panel was convened and, exhibiting all the shortcomings the SWP now owns up to, dismissed the case against Smith. This immediately led to clandestine oppositions forming (there are, for practical purposes, no other kinds of oppositions in the SWP). Four members were expelled on the basis of leaked Facebook chat logs - which, of course, had the effect of drawing more attention to the matter.

At the SWP's conference early in 2013, things came to a head in the vote on whether to accept the DC's annual report, which covered the Smith case; the loyalists just edged to victory, but it was to prove extremely costly. The full transcript of the debate was anonymously leaked to the wider movement and

rapidly published. One member in attendance, Tom Walker, used the pages of the *Weekly Worker* to give his scathing account of the goings on - as far as I am aware, the most widely read article we have published as long as I have been writing here. The bourgeois press then got hold of it, and the SWP's usual disciplinary mechanisms simply ceased functioning. Hundreds went into open rebellion, with the full support of almost the whole of the wider movement.

The leadership had a choice at that point - between the olive branch and the truncheon. They chose the truncheon. All who courageously and rightly rebelled against this scandalous failure were denounced as wreckers, anarchists, liberals, agents of "creeping feminism", and so forth. Two factions arose, one - more militant - around Richard Seymour, and including the 'Facebook Four'; and another, more conciliatory outfit that included many long-standing and respected SWP loyalists and intellectuals, including Ian Birchall and Neil Davidson. The militants chose to resign early on, under very heavy manners and likely to be expelled *en masse* anyway. The 'moderates' fought on under the name, 'In Defence of our Party', attempting to split ordinary-Joe comrades from the ultra-hardliners in the leadership (who somebody drolly nicknamed 'In defence of our Martin'). They, too, were defeated and driven out.

By the end of 2013, the SWP was in such terrible shape that it was almost possible to imagine it just winking out of existence - as indeed its former sister party, the US International Socialist Organization, would a few years later. The SWP had lost more or less half of its active membership, including something like 95% of its student membership. Its reputation in the wider movement - always a little uneven - was completely shredded. It was banned from several student unions as a 'threat to women', and attempts were made to do the same in trade unions as well. On more than one occasion, SWP literature was ritually burned by angry students.

## Solutions

Is this what the SWP is apologising to its former members for? We have little doubt that the leadership now *regrets* the course it took in 2013 to some extent: how could it not, given the calamitous consequences of that choice? Yet in the context of this

document, it seems otherwise.

The organisation owns up to having had inadequate disputes procedures, but not to the fanaticism with which its leadership set out to drive out all who saw those procedures as inadequate at the time. It self-criticises for being blind to the power differential between a leading member and a young recruit, in the manner of a liberal 'age-gap discourse' think-piece, but, so far as we can tell, the ultra-centralist 'command and control' structure, which *amplifies* that differential, remains in place. If members were found considering their options for protesting a new Martin Smith-type case that was mishandled, it is quite certain that they would be expelled all over again.

Unsurprisingly then, according to the SWP's account of what it learned from this episode, it was more or less entirely procedural. In today's SWP, we are told,

anyone accused of rape or harassment is suspended from SWP membership, while an investigation is taking place. If a member of the SWP's elected leadership body is subject to an accusation that needs to be investigated, no member of that same leadership body - or former member of the leadership who worked with them - will be on the panel looking into the case. It will also be ensured that the person bringing the allegation is happy with the nature and membership of the panel overseeing the case before it begins.

Our new procedures also reaffirm that those bringing such accusations should be supported, whether they decide to go to the SWP's disputes committee, the elected body that handles such matters, or to seek to use legal avenues, such as the police and courts. We should always proactively take measures to protect women who come forward with accusations.

When holding hearings over cases of sexual misconduct, we now, in common with many other organisations on the left, seek to apply the guidelines drawn up by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

Much of this is reasonable, and indeed addresses some of the more glaring injustices in the Martin Smith case. It is telling, however, that the reader is referred to the EHRC guidance on such matters, drawn up to help employers deal with workplace disputes of this nature.

I use the phrase, 'to help employers', deliberately. As with the common run of such guidance, the target audience is human-resources people, whose fundamental job is to protect *the employer* from reputational damage and expensive litigation. It is well known, for example, that the 'diversity, equity and inclusion' training industry - which is so much the occasion of rightwing culture warlordism today, especially in the United States - has the perverse bottom-line effect of making it *harder* for aggrieved employees to pursue legal remedies from their bosses for discrimination. The company lawyers can tell the courts: 'We make everyone take a class in how not to be racist - what more can we do?'

The EHRC guidance, specifically, mandates confidentiality in formal proceedings.<sup>2</sup> This is just great for a bureaucratic corporation, since it ensures that everything has to go through 'official channels'; The EHRC are the only people who even know who is involved. It is spectacularly unsuited to a small left group with an politically homogenous leadership caste, because - no matter how much effort is to be expended - the 'HR department' will *always* be colleagues of the accused leader. The general effect even in corporate life, however, is that the top people get away with it, with only the lower-level creeps facing the music. For the masses, sunlight is the best disinfectant. It was only by *exposing* the scandal, after all, that the SWP rebels managed to impose *any* consequences on the SWP leadership.

## In the thick

Eleven years ago, in the thick of the crisis, I wrote an article on it with the headline, 'Rape is not the problem',<sup>3</sup> which led to a flurry of angry letters in response.<sup>4</sup> I think I might today put some things in it less flippantly, but in substance the point remains. We live in a sexist society that, in spite of very real gains by the left and women's movement over the decades, continues to put women in danger of sexual predation by men, from wolf-whistles up to rape. We cannot suppose that any organisation of any size that contains both sexes will be wholly free from such things. The question is whether we will be *doomed* to mishandle such cases, or not; whether their exposure will lead to meaningful internal correction, or not.

The SWP's feminist critics had always proposed that the basic problem was that the SWP was not feminist enough - that is, not enough women in leadership, lack of women's caucuses (and perhaps of consciousness-raising among men, although that was always controversial), etc. It was always a slightly odd take on the Smith case - after all, the DC panel was majority-female, and the two dissenting voices from it were both men; later in the crisis, the most gung-ho defender of Smith was generally thought to be Amy Leather. Instead, it was arguably an object lesson in how the 'representation' politics of bourgeois feminism is *utterly useless* to ordinary women.

The final demonstration of this is surely the lessons the SWP has chosen to learn: that the answer to what is essentially a *political* failing - an incorrect conception of the party that reduces ordinary members to obedient little soldiers for the leadership and full-timers - is a few pieces of feminist virtue-signalling (the statement comes with a *trigger warning*, for heaven's sake) and a few borrowings from HR best practices.

We expect it will get them no credit from those who call them rape apologists; but what is *their* alternative, really? ●

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## Notes

1. socialistworker.co.uk/press-releases/statement-2013.
2. www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/2021/sexual-harassment-and-harassment-at-work.pdf.
3. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/953/swp-and-feminism-rape-is-not-the-problem.
4. See *Weekly Worker* March 21 and March 28 2013.

## STRATEGY

# Minimal symmetrical errors

One upholds only the maximum programme in elections, the other rejects the maximum programme as ultra-leftist, but neither shows the least understanding of the minimum programme. Mike Macnair replies to Adam Buick and Steve Freeman

By coincidence, last week this paper carried pieces that included symmetrical errors on the minimum programme.

Adam Buick in a letter advertised the point that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is not doing significantly *better* in elections on (what he calls) a minimum programme than the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which is standing on an avowed maximum-programme-only platform. Steve Freeman in his article, which we headlined ‘Marching towards what solution?’, criticises Moshé Machover (and the CPGB, which has adopted a variant of comrade Machover’s position) for advocating a *socialist* regionalist approach to the decolonisation of Palestine, which he argues is ultra-leftist, because it fails to take (what he calls) a minimum programme approach.

Comrade Buick comments:

the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, appealing to trade union-conscious workers with a programme of attractive-sounding reforms (what used to be called ‘the minimum programme’), polled more or less the same as the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which was standing on a straight platform of socialism - the common ownership and democratic control of the means of living, with production directly to meet people’s needs, not profit - and nothing but (what used to be called ‘the maximum programme’).

But what’s the point of standing on a minimum programme when you are not going to get more votes than if you stood on the maximum programme?

This is at one level a fair point. But Tusc actually stands - thanks to its Trotskyist progenitors, the Socialist Party in England and Wales - not on a ‘minimum’ programme, but on a version of a ‘transitional’ programme. That is, one that aims (according to the Fourth International in 1938):

to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.<sup>1</sup>

In practice, what is ‘transitional’ turns out to be merely what is currently popular - “attractive-sounding reforms”. In contrast, the minimum programmes of the pre-1914 social democratic parties generally included the abolition of the standing army and its replacement by a militia, or the general arming of the people. They also included a series of other constitutional demands that would not be obviously adapted to “today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class”. For example, the German Eisenach (1869) and Gotha (1875) programmes called for trial by jury, and the 1891 Erfurt programme for the election of judges;<sup>2</sup> the 1880 Programme of the French Parti Ouvrier called for the confiscation of the assets of the (Catholic) church

and the ‘suppression of the public debt’ (which means the destruction of the financial markets);<sup>3</sup> the Socialist Party of America’s 1908 platform called for the abolition of the Senate and of judicial review of legislation.<sup>4</sup> The point of the minimum programme, then, is *not* to be “a programme of attractive-sounding reforms”.

Turning to comrade Freeman, he claims that the ‘Middle Eastern socialism’ position

veers into ultra-leftism, because it has no political programme for the Israeli-Palestinian working class. It sets international socialism against the national democratic struggle and ladders the Hebrew working class with a passive ‘wait and see’ politics. A national programme makes the ambition of fighting for the unity of Israeli and Palestinian workers central. It is not that Moshé simply ignores the national dimension: rather he adopts a limited programme of minimum conditions, not a minimum programme. ...

Working class republicanism makes the democratic secular republic the central plank of a programme of achievable reforms. This was called the minimum programme in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

Comrade Buick thinks that we should dump the minimum programme, defined as “attractive-sounding reforms”. Comrade Freeman thinks that we should *limit our proposals* to the minimum programme, conceived as “a programme of achievable reforms”. This is a degraded form of comrade Freeman’s earlier arguments for a two-stage revolution - first a ‘democratic’ revolution against the monarchy leading to a ‘dual power republic’, which then poses the question of workers’ power. We can leave this history of comrade Freeman’s arguments on one side, however. The idea that “the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a democratic republic” and implementation of the rest of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party’s programme<sup>5</sup> was an “achievable reform” in the tsarist empire of 1903 is plain nonsense: it would be the revolutionary overthrow of the state. (The same is, in fact, true of the overthrow of the monarchy in the UK today.) The point of the minimum programme, then, is *not* to be “a programme of achievable reforms”.

I wrote 17 years ago on the question of what the point of the minimum programme positively was, and how the confusion that is reflected in the idea of a ‘transitional programme’, and in comrade Buick’s and Freeman’s specific versions, began.<sup>6</sup> But the issue is a fundamentally important one and it is worth repeating some basic points.

### France

The expression, ‘minimum programme’, appears to be Marx’s, if it was not already in use.<sup>7</sup> It is found in an 1880 letter to Friedrich Sorge discussing the programme of the Parti Ouvrier

(of earlier the same year) and its impact in France. Marx says:

With the exception of some trivialities ... the economic section of the very brief document consists solely of demands that have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself, except for the introductory passages where the communist goal is defined in a few words.

### Enemy camp

He goes on to discuss the impact of the programme - in the first place in the workers’ movement, but also more widely:

Meanwhile we also have had and have our champions in the camp of the enemy itself - ie, in the radical camp ... Clemenceau, who publicly came out only last April against socialism and as the advocate of American-democratic-republican views, has swung over to us in his latest Marseilles speech against Gambetta, both in its general tendency and in its principal points, as contained in the *minimum programme*.<sup>8</sup>

The usage at this period is not only Marx’s. Paul Brousse was a Bakuninist in 1870-77. By 1880-81 he had become one of the creators of the ‘Possibilist’ (capital P) wing of the Parti Ouvrier, which in 1881 denounced the 1880 programme, called the “*programme minimum*”, as an ultra-left text that created a separation between the party and “workers’ aspirations”.<sup>9</sup>

‘Maximum’ and ‘minimum’ are, in a sense, slightly misleading. The programme of the Parti Ouvrier has, in fact, *three* sections. The first (what came to be called the ‘maximum programme’) is what Marx in this letter calls “the introductory passages where the communist goal is defined in a few words”. The second is the *political section*. In the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*, this contains a series of democratic-republican demands, also found grouped together in the German Eisenach (1869), Gotha (1875), and

Erfurt (1891) programmes, and in a variant set in the programmes of the pre-1914 Socialist Party of America, which I have already mentioned.

The marked common features of these ‘political’ programmes indicate that they are all versions of the common position of the ‘Marx party’ in this period: ie, that the working class has to fight for the democratic republic as the form in which the working class can take power. Thus, unlike the third, ‘economic’, section of the Parti Ouvrier programme, the political demands are not (as Marx put it) “demands that have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself”.

Why did Marx insist so strongly in his letter to Sorge on the ‘economic section’ consisting of “demands that have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself”? The answer is that this approach is counterposed to utopian schemes *about the nature of the organisation of the future communist society*.

The essence of the ‘Marxist’ policy was that the working class needed to take political power, and for that purpose to struggle for the democratic republic. Given that the proposal was that the working class take over the running of society, it was *the working class itself* that needed to decide on economic and other policy priorities. The core of the minimum programme is the democratic republic. But it also contains a variety of economic demands: the Parti Ouvrier programme calls, for example, for the eight-hour day, for a “legal minimum wage determined each year according to the local price of food, by a workers’ statistical commission”; for “the annulment of all the contracts that have alienated public property (banks, railways, mines, etc) and the exploitation of all state-owned workshops to be entrusted to the workers who work there”. The Erfurt programme calls, for example, for “free medical care, including midwifery and medicines. Free burial”. And so on.

### Prolonged

The minimum programme needs to be placed in the context of Marx, elsewhere, on the nature of proletarian revolution. First is a famous passage from *The civil war in France* (1871):

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old, collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.<sup>10</sup>

Second is a much less famous one, from Marx’s ‘Conspectus of Bakunin’s *Statism and anarchy*’ (written at some point in 1874-75, and first published in 1926):

Bakunin: If there is a state [*gosudarstvo*],

then there is unavoidably domination [*gospodstvo*], and consequently slavery. Domination without slavery, open or veiled, is unthinkable - this is why we are enemies of the state.

What does it mean, the proletariat organised as ruling class?

Marx: It means that the proletariat, instead of struggling sectionally against the economically privileged class, has attained sufficient strength and organisation to employ general means of coercion in this struggle. It can, however, only use such economic means as abolish its own character as salariat, hence as class. With its complete victory its own rule thus also ends, as its class character has disappeared.<sup>11</sup>

The point is that the transition from capitalism to communism is a prolonged process. It is one that has already begun, in a deformed way, under capitalist rule - but has been partially thrown back by the policy of ‘rollback’ begun most clearly under Jimmy Carter, by the fall of the USSR, and so on. These defeats illustrate the fact that, as Marx and Engels and their co-thinkers argued, it is only under working class political rule that the transition can be completed. This will also be in a prolonged process: “long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men”.

What full communism will look like will depend on choices made over decades by the working class *ruling* on a global scale. The minimum programme is a programme for working class rule right now. It is for this reason that it combines a platform for political democracy with *some* economic measures - ones that are immediately posed.

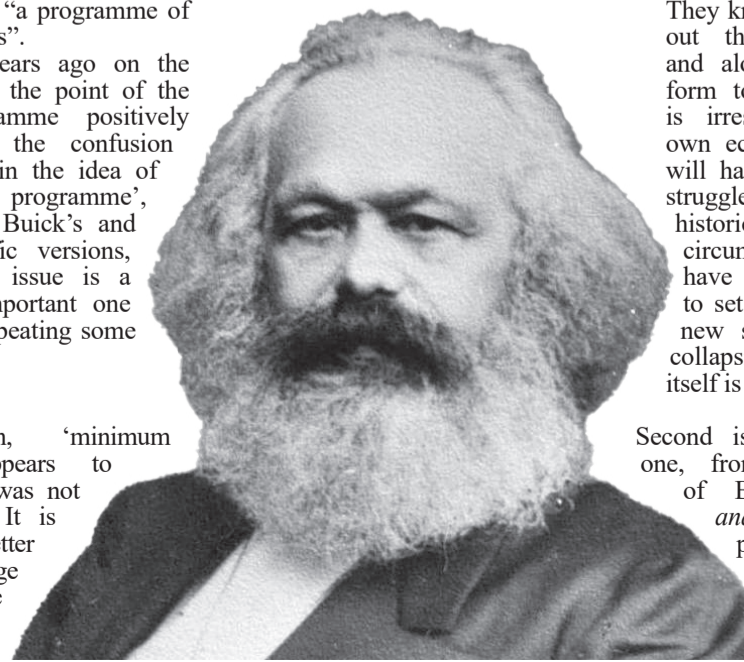
Much has changed in the 150 years since the Gotha programme and Marx’s ‘Conspectus’. But the fundamental point still stands. We need a minimum programme not to be “attractive-sounding” or “achievable”, but because the working class needs now to take political power - through the democratic republic or ‘extreme democracy’ - and, having done so, to *begin* a prolonged process of the communist reconstruction of society ●

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### Notes

1. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp.
2. Eisenach: archive.org/stream/EisenachProgram/725\_socDemWorkersParty\_230\_djvu.txt; Gotha: archive.org/stream/GothaProgramme/726\_socWrksParty\_gothaProgram\_231\_djvu.txt; Erfurt: sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1891erfurt.asp.
3. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.
4. cosmonautmag.com/2023/01/american-socialism-from-1892-to-1908-a-study-in-two-programs.
5. www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/rsdlp/1903/program.htm.
6. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/686/for-a-minimum-programme (part of a series accessible at communistuniversity.uk/mike-macnair-programme-and-party-articles.)
7. The phrase is not in the *Oxford English dictionary*, and a Google search has produced nothing earlier than Marx; but this does not exclude the possibility that it was in political use before Marx.
8. Marx to Sorge, November 5 1880: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/letters/80\_11\_05.htm (original emphasis).
9. D Stafford *From anarchism to reformism* Toronto 1971; the quotes are from p175.
10. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm.
11. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/04/bakunin-notes.htm.

He advocated, wrote and defended the revolutionary minimum programme



**CLIMATE**

# Mark of the beast

Trying to 'influence those with the greatest power' to 'minimise' the 'harmful effects of climate change' with the 'utmost speed and resolution' has proven to be a predictable failure, argues **Jack Conrad**. Instead of soggy protest politics, we need the politics of power

**A**nthropogenic climate change represents the most acute danger to human civilisation - well, that and generalised nuclear exchange. Only if truly revolutionary measures are taken do we stand a chance of preventing some sort of collapse into a new age of barbarism. Yet governments, whether of the conservative, liberal or left-reformist type - despite now routine eco-posturing - are all in thrall to accumulation for the sake of accumulation, production for the sake of production. The mark of the beast being M-C-M'.

Even if we take seriously their solemn commitments, made in Paris 2015, of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to net zero by 2050 - and only a fool would - it is, in all probability, too late. The opportunity to limit global warming to well below 2°C above preindustrial levels, and "preferably" to just 1.5°C, has, in all likelihood, already passed. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>O and other greenhouse gases continue apace. The Copernicus Climate Change Service has recently reported 11 record monthly temperatures in a row. Sea surface temperatures have been at a record high for the past 13 months.<sup>1</sup> This results in well-reported deadly-pockets of extreme heat and precipitation.

A clear majority, some 80%, of senior climate scientists - authors of the influential Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports - see the world as giddily, crazily, on course to exceed the 1.5°C limit as the global norm: the "central estimate" being 2030-32. After that the general expectation is of a rise to "at least 2.5°C above preindustrial levels".<sup>2</sup>

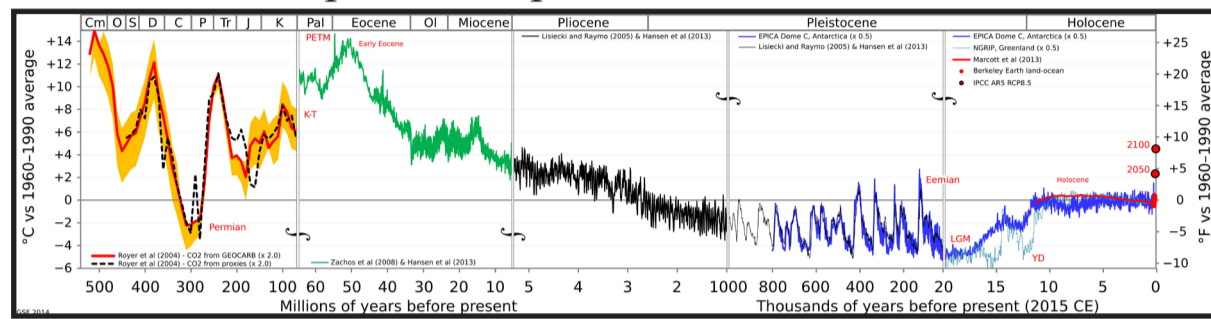
Will it stop there? The danger of 3°C, 3.5°C, 4°C might be avoided, but only if we act with the utmost decisiveness. Given present trends, a 4°C world "may be reached as soon as the 2060s".<sup>3</sup> Such an increase would see the polar ice caps substantially shrink, masses of fresh water released into the oceans, sea levels heading for a 10-metre rise and a possible further feedback surge in global temperatures.

Large areas of the tropics become uninhabitable. The North American wheat belt turns to desert. Millions are displaced. Countless cities are inundated: Alexandria, Dhaka, Jakarta, Bangkok, Kolkata, Miami, Houston, New Orleans, Rotterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Osaka and Shanghai lie top of the list. Along with much of Europe and western Asia, Britain eventually fragments into a series of islands. Manchester becomes Manchester-on-Sea.

Given that such a prospect might conceivably be merely the prelude to climate catastrophe and a mass extinction, including of our own species, it is clear that protests in the name of Green New Deal, Just Stop Oil, Insulate Britain, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future are, for all their good intentions, woefully inadequate. Nor are strikes, occupations or the sabotage of oil pipelines anywhere enough. The politics of protest must surely be superseded by the politics of power.

## Capitalocene

To appreciate the dangers we face our best guide is the paleoclimatic record. This actually provides a blueprint for what we need to do to preserve, what the renowned climate scientist, Michael Mann, calls our



**Earth's temperature from 500 million years ago up to today**

"fragile moment" on a planet that has survived much more than what we humans could.<sup>4</sup>

Earth dates back around 4.6 billion years to the formation of the solar system. During the Hadean eon, the planet's molten surface slowly cooled and hardened into a solid crust.<sup>5</sup> The first atmosphere had abundant amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> - perhaps between 10 and 200 times as much as today.<sup>6</sup> Solar winds stripped away the lighter, volatile gases. Because of the much closer proximity of Earth's giant moon compared with today, together with churning volcanic activity and countless asteroid and meteorite strikes, a second atmosphere formed: besides CO<sub>2</sub>, there was ammonia, methane, carbon monoxide and water. Earth was a hothouse - more like present-day Venus than present-day Mars.<sup>7</sup> Surface temperatures were a sizzling 230°C. Despite that, there were oceans. Heavy atmospheric pressure, maybe up to 90 bar, prevented liquid water evaporating into steam.

According to the famous theory developed - independently - by Alexander Oparin and JBS Haldane in the 1920s, shallow seas constituted a "primeval soup".<sup>8</sup> The abiotic processing of CHNO compounds resulted in the building blocks of life: ie, prebiotic compounds. Others, more recently, have argued for hydrothermal vents.<sup>9</sup> Either way, as shown by the fossil record, simple, heterotrophic (food-eating) life, spontaneously began some four billion years ago. Five hundred million years later, tiny, single-cell blue-green algae were converting carbon dioxide into oxygen through photosynthesis. Eventually there was enough oxygen in the atmosphere to react with the methane and turn the sky blue.<sup>10</sup> So Earth's third atmosphere is the product of co-evolution. Indeed our climate results from the interaction of atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere ... and biosphere.

The ozone layer formed 600 million years ago ... and as a by-product provided vital shielding from the sun's biologically harmful ultraviolet rays.<sup>11</sup> However, the evolutionary leap into complex life forms happened in the balmy seas of some 540 million years ago. The Cambrian explosion occupies a mere few million years - in geological terms, a blink of the eye - and led to "virtually all major groups of modern animals".<sup>12</sup>

Temperatures in the deep past were mostly much higher than today. The Cambrian (600-500 million years ago) was 14°C hotter. The Ordovician (488-443 mya) 4°C hotter. The Silurian (443-419 mya) 4°C hotter. The Devonian (419-358 mya) 10°C hotter. The Permian (298-252 mya) 3°C colder. The Triassic (252-201 mya) 10°C hotter. The Jurassic (201-145 mya) 8°C hotter. The Cretaceous (145-66 mya) 4°C

hotter. The Palaeocene (66-55 mya) 10°C hotter. The Eocene (55-33 mya) 4.5°C to 12°C hotter (all figures being my rough and ready estimates).<sup>13</sup> Doubtless, some of these temperature changes were due to planetary wobbles (Milankovitch cycles) and variations in solar brightness. But there is also plate tectonics.

Three billion years ago the vast mass of the Earth's surface seems to have been covered with water. There were only a few spots of dry land. Arctica (or Arctida) was perhaps the first supercontinent, and arose some 2.5 billion years ago (there might well have been others, but, if so, only mere geological fragments remain). Eventually Arctica broke apart, but after many more millions of years there were other succeeding continents and supercontinents: Kenorland, Columbia, Rodinia, Pannotia. Beginning in the Neoproterozoic, about 550 million years ago, most of Earth's land masses are found joined together in the Gondwana supercontinent.

Meanwhile, in the seas, giant plankton blooms resulted in oxygen increasing to about 20% of the atmosphere - roughly the same as today - conditions ripe for terrestrial flora and fauna. Probably the migration from the seas began some 500 million years ago.<sup>14</sup> Complex life, however, underwent five mass extinctions: the Ordovician-Silurian (444 mya); late Devonian (360 mya); end of the Permian (250 mya); end of the Triassic (200 mya); end of the Cretaceous (65 mya). Rapid climate change caused by glaciation, volcanic activity, asteroids and tectonic uplift being the main explanations.

Something like our present configuration of continents appeared 60 million years ago. Doubtless this helped establish our contemporary algalic - ie, chilling - climate regime. The North American and Eurasian land masses more or less encircle the northern pole; that and the Antarctic continental plate centred on the southern pole provide almost perfect conditions for ensuring an oscillation between cool and cold conditions. Moreover, the bulk of Earth's fresh water is kept frozen in two gigantic polar ice sheets - which means much reduced sea levels.

Over the last million years there has been a glacial-interglacial, 100,000-year pattern. Each cycle has its own particular features and oddities. Understandably, though, as with any study of the past, data becomes ever more uncertain with increasing distances of time. So the best records we possess go from the interglacial, known as the Eemian, down to the present Holocene period - deep ice cores drilled from Greenland and Antarctica have yielded enormous amounts of information.

In terms of climatic transition, the most reliable information is for what is called the Younger Dryas to

Holocene, which ended the last ice age. At its maximum, some 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, the Arctic ice sheet extended all the way down to Chicago, New York, Moscow and London and saw much lower sea levels than today. What is now Britain was joined to France, the Netherlands and Denmark. Recent studies give a -6.1°C average temperature.<sup>15</sup>

The transition to our present-day climate regime occurred some 11,650 years ago and saw the retreat of the great ice sheets. The tipping point seems to have been only a decade or two long. It is argued that the "speed of this change is probably representative of similar, but less well-studied, climate transitions during the last few hundred thousand years".<sup>16</sup>

During the present (Holocene) interglacial period, there have been cold and dry phases occurring over a roughly 1,500-year cycle, and climate transitions on a decade-to-century timescale. There have been little ice ages, as well as bursts of relative warmth. Between 1100 and 1300, for example, Europe experienced temperatures which were 0.7°C to 1.6°C higher than today (though, it must be emphasised, this was a local, not a global, phenomenon: elsewhere things were cooler). That allowed for more productive agriculture throughout the continent and saw flourishing English vineyards. It is also worth recalling, though, that the Thames regularly froze solid during mid-17th century winters and that the years from 1805 to 1820 were comparably cold and bleak.

What we are experiencing at present certainly needs to be put into the context of the transition from the little ice age, which finally ended around 1880. Temperatures would be expected to rise ... very slightly. But, of course, what we have seen is way beyond that: temperatures increased on average by 0.08°C every decade since 1880 and by an average 0.18°C since 1981.<sup>17</sup> The main cause is human-induced greenhouse gases: eg, in the 20th and 21st centuries "the level of carbon dioxide rose by 40%" - now the highest for some 20 million years (UK Met Office).<sup>18</sup>

## Weather campaign

Our potted history of global atmosphere, temperature variation and continental drift helps explain why those with even a passing knowledge of Earth sciences consider the Campaign against Climate Change such a weird choice of name. Despite being promoted by the Socialist Workers Party, the CCC (founded in 2001) is politically safe, soggy and, quite frankly, stupid.

Capitalism, socialism, the working class all go unmentioned. And, of course, crucially, 'climate' and 'change' go together like 'weather' and 'change'. The two are inseparable. The weather changes from hour to

hour, day to day and month to month. Imagine a Campaign against Weather Change. It would be too, too silly. According to its 'mission statement', the CCC exists to "influence those with the greatest power" to "minimise" the "harmful effects of climate change" with the "utmost speed and resolution".

Flattering courtiers similarly pleaded to Canute - the 11th century king of Norway, Denmark and England - to reverse the incoming tide. Needless to say, as he famously showed (purportedly on Thorney Island), no-one, not even he, could pull off such a feat. Nor, despite CCC "street demonstrations" and avoidance of "detailed questions" in the attempt to "bring together as many people as possible", can we really expect "those with the greatest power" to agree an "international climate treaty" that will actually "minimise" the "harmful effects of climate change".<sup>19</sup>

Well, of course, since that 'mission statement' was first written, an "international climate treaty" has been agreed. With much fanfare, Cop21 was adopted on December 12 2015 in Paris, signed on April 22 2016 by 195 parties and supposedly made effective on November 4 2016. But will this international climate treaty "minimise" the "harmful effects of climate change"? Hardly: CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have reached a record high: 419.3 parts per million - 50% up, compared with preindustrial times.<sup>20</sup>

Surely then, to "minimise" those "harmful effects" our sights must be set far higher than "street demonstrations" (and sit-down road protests, attacking art works and disrupting sporting events). We must talk about capitalism. We must talk about socialism. We must talk about organising the working class into the ruling class. The CCC 'mission statement' needs more than a long overdue update. No, an entirely different kind of politics is needed.

## Tipping points

Climate is big weather. Karen Bice gives the following definition: climate "is simply weather 'averaged' over a time period of one year or more".<sup>21</sup> In other words, there is nothing fixed about the climate. Climate change has never ceased, is ongoing and must therefore be considered inevitable. Notions of a static, unchanging climate are, to put it mildly, therefore badly misconceived.

Yet, while the climate constantly undergoes change, that happens within a self-adjusting system: that is, within a relatively stable equilibrium, and hence distinct geological epochs and periods. However, yes, there are tipping points - often accompanied by mass extinctions.

Till recently, most scientists thought that all large-scale climate change took place over a timescale of many millions of years: ie, at rates unnoticeable during a human lifetime. Not least for political reasons, gradualism was the ruling orthodoxy. No longer. Eg, "All the evidence indicates that most long-term climate change occurs in sudden jumps rather than incremental changes."<sup>22</sup> In point of fact, through mathematical advances, supercomputers and new modelling techniques that link together weather and climate, scientists can now make extraordinarily accurate predictions, including when quantitative change tips over into qualitative change. That

is what got Syukuro Manabe, Klaus Hasselmann and Giorgio Parisi their 2021 Nobel prize in physics.<sup>23</sup>

Such conclusions were anticipated by GWF Hegel and his objective idealism. Marx and Engels, of course, turned Hegel upside-down (onto his feet). What Hegel developed as mysterious laws of thought - all leading to the 'absolute idea' (though often illustrated with striking examples drawn from nature and history) - could be put onto solidly materialist foundations and presented in a straightforward manner. According to Frederick Engels, writing in his *Dialectics of nature* (1873-86), there are three general - dialectical - laws of nature and human society: (1) the transformation of quantity into quality; (2) the interpenetration of opposites; (3) the negation of the negation.<sup>24</sup>

Long before Marx and Engels (and Hegel), it should not be forgotten that the best of the ancient Greek philosophers saw the world in ceaseless flux, coming into being out of a fiery chaos, and things changing into their opposites. Similar, wonderfully impressive, dialectical insights can be found amongst Chinese and Indian sages too.

However, in particular during the 19th and 20th centuries, the bourgeois establishment lived in dread of sudden change. The French revolution of 1789, the 1793-94 Reign of Terror, Chartism, the 1848 revolutions, the 1871 Paris Commune, the rise and rise of mass Marxist parties and the world-shaking 1917 October Revolution saw to that. Sudden change - well, until the promotion of 'colour revolutions' - was equated with artificiality, aberrance, threat and disaster. Therefore, (Tory) fixity, and its opposite, (Whig) gradualism, were the ruling ideas, and not only in politics.

Isaac Newton allowed for the movement of the planets, but on orbits given fixity by "universal gravitation"<sup>25</sup> - the first impulse being brought about by the finger of god himself. The steady state theory of the universe was only finally overturned in the mid-20th century. Edwin Hubble's observations, and calculations made by Albert Einstein, allowed Alexander Friedmann to show that the whole of the universe is expanding, along with space itself. Fred Hoyle represented the conservatives' last stand. The *coup de grâce* came with the work of Martin Ryle on quasars and the accidental discovery of the cosmic microwave background to the big bang by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson. Beginning with a superdense singularity some 13.8 billion years ago, the diameter of the observable universe is today around 93 billion light years.

Similarly with biology. Lorenz Oken, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Karl Ernst von Baer and above all Charles Darwin overthrew old Linnaean notions of the fixity of species. Instead they argued for evolution - one species led to another. Studies of the fossil record, studies of domesticated plants and animals, studies of variations in the wild - all proved it. Famously though, Darwin endlessly delayed publication of his *On the origin of species* (1859). He feared outraging Christian sensibilities. He also feared Chartist revolution.<sup>26</sup> And precisely because of its revolutionary implications, Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection was determinedly gradualistic in presentation.

Most modern readers fail to notice how much of the *Origin* consists of a defence of gradualism rather than simply being one long argument about natural selection. After all, in the concluding chapter, Darwin declared his commitment to the postulate: "*Natura non facit saltum*" (nature does not proceed by leaps).<sup>27</sup> It was Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge who finally broke through this orthodoxy. In 1972 they presented

their theory of punctuated equilibrium. Species undergo genetic drift, but are essentially stable as phenotypes. Crucially though, the emergence of a new species - speciation - occurs via "sudden" transitions.<sup>28</sup> The debt to Marxism is all too apparent. Many other such examples in science could be cited, but that would be tiresome. The tipping point, jump, sudden shift, phase transition, call it what you will: the dialectical leap is generally accepted in fact, if not always in name.

## Opportunities

Climatic change can doubtless produce new opportunities. Palaeontologists note that growing polar ice sheets and the spread of the African savannah 3.6 to 4 million years ago coincided with the "split" in the "evolutionary line" between ourselves and chimpanzees and gorillas.<sup>29</sup> Our ancestors came down from the trees and began to walk upright. Subsequently, other glacial periods and lower sea levels eased migration into Australia and then the Americas by fully modern humans. Getting to Australia from Asia some 60,000 years ago needed only a short hop from the (much larger than it is now) island of Timor. With Siberia connected to Alaska by the Bering land bridge, tribal groups - perhaps just five of them - simply wandered into America 22,000 years ago and 10,000 years later had peopled the whole of the Americas all the way down to Tierra del Fuego.<sup>30</sup>

The beginning of crop agriculture in the Middle East certainly corresponds very closely with a sudden warming event, which marks the onset of the Holocene. Desertification slowly squeezed people into remaining riverine strips of greenery - a mixed blessing. For the emerging elite there came power, palaces, luxury goods and leisure; for the masses a nutritionally much reduced diet and backbreaking toil.<sup>31</sup>

However, there are numerous yanking civilisational collapses: eg, the great Bronze Age states of the eastern Mediterranean, the Harappan in the Indus valley and the Khmer in southeast Asia. The Mayan cities of central America were abandoned one by one and "most cultural activities ceased".<sup>32</sup> True, there is the danger of elevating climate into a monoexplanation. Invasion by neighbouring tribes or states, civil war, disease in crops and humans and the class struggle all play their part too.

Nowadays, there are still a few determined cranks who think "global warming can be good for us".<sup>33</sup> Crops grow faster, plants absorb more CO<sub>2</sub>, less severe cold weather, ice-free roads, etc. Some even look forward to 'normal people' living in Antarctica. Despite the sunless four-months of winter there is abundant coal, oil and other mineral resources to exploit. However, the overwhelming scientific consensus lies with 'climate change is bad for us'. The danger is not just the collapse of civilisation on a local or even a regional scale, but globally ... and maybe the sixth, the Holocene, mass extinction. The current rate of species extinction is estimated at 100 to 1,000 times higher than the natural background extinction rate.<sup>34</sup>

The IPCC has already issued a "code red". Human activity is changing the climate in ways "unprecedented" in thousands - or hundreds of thousands - of years. Some of the changes are likely to be "irreversible" over centuries or millennia - including melting polar ice caps, rising sea levels and more and more droughts, floods and fires.<sup>35</sup> And, while Antarctica might become habitable by 'normal people', large parts of the so-called third world, especially in the tropics, which are today home for 40% of the human species, become uninhabitable. People cannot cope with temperatures of 42°C-plus for any length of time. It

is beyond our "physiological limits".<sup>36</sup>

With this in mind, Tim Palmer, professor of climate physics at Oxford, warns that we face "some kind of hell on Earth".<sup>37</sup> The reason why is surely all too obvious: M-C-M'. Under capitalism, money is laid out for the production of commodities with one overriding aim, making more money (ie, profit). The secret of making something out of nothing lies, of course, in the exploitation of labour-power. Surplus value is pumped out from workers and realised through market sale. Using money to make more money is, though, a never-ending imperative. Capital is an alien force which stands over and imposes itself on each and every capitalist (they are mere personifications of capital). "Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets" (Marx).<sup>38</sup> Invest, invest, invest. Grow, grow - overcome all barriers to growth. Unless they convert the greater part of surplus value into capital, they fall behind, lose the race and bankruptcy beckons.

With its never satiated lust for profit, capitalism is almost tailor-made to trash nature - and, despite its different political economy, the Soviet Union and its 'socialist' bloc made no difference here. As for China - today the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases - it is fully integrated into the global capitalist economy. Hence, while some still talk of the Anthropocene, as if it is an undifferentiated humanity that is to blame for global warming, it is surely better, more accurate, to talk of the Capitalocene.

## Covid socialism

For many on the left, not unreasonably, capitalism is defined as categorically incapable of carrying out the radical measures required: eg, "... we should have no illusions that the ruling class will do what is necessary going forwards" (*The Communist*).<sup>39</sup> "... to save the planet, we need to kill capitalism" (*Socialist Worker*).<sup>40</sup> "Can this climate emergency be halted under the current world economic, political and social system - capitalism? ... No" (*The Socialist*).<sup>41</sup>

However, even the most fabulously wealthy billionaires or the system's top politicians and state actors - well, in the main - are not so blind that they cannot see that something must be urgently done. True, it is hard to imagine present-day governments carrying out a programme that would actually achieve net-zero emissions - after all, that would require a dramatic restructuring of the entire global economy. Therefore, in all probability, today's crop of lying, narrow-minded, bribable establishment politicians will continue with gestures, cheap platform rhetoric and legislating for an electorally safe distant future. Meantime it is more nuclear power plants, more roads, more air travel, more poor-quality housing ... crucially, more of everything - ie, more economic growth.

Yet, as seen with the Covid pandemic - and World War II and World War I before that - the ruling class was prepared to allow governments to temporarily suspend the law of value. The normal workings of capitalism were overridden, curtailed or tightly directed in order to achieve agreed state aims.

The more intelligent sections of the left have written about how governments introduced Covid socialism - roughly equivalent to the *Kriegssozialismus* (war socialism) put into effect by the German high command in 1916: ie, the use of concentrated state power to deal with a dire emergency. The Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine is a good example. Developed double quick, produced on a non-profit basis, it was then rolled out and administered according to need by the NHS. In

terms of the general interest - more particularly the general capitalist interest - governments will take what are usually regarded as extreme measures.

Faced with Covid-19, then Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak talked about tearing up his economic textbooks, doing what is necessary, thinking the unthinkable, and so on and so forth. Though fraught with horrendous difficulties - not least because capitalism (from the level of the firm to that of the state) is characterised by internally generated contradictions - we should not categorically discount the possibility that this will happen with the climate crisis. After all, the capitalist class lives on the same fragile planet as the rest of us (even if Elon Musk would like to rocket off to a frigid, lifeless, almost airless Mars).

So climate socialism imposed by a firefighter state - maybe urged on by Friends of the Earth, the Green Party, XR and CCC demands for the declaration of a 'climate emergency'; maybe with 'beyond politics' green advisors, enlightened technocrats and the armed forces playing a leading role - such a state could conceivably impose draconian restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions by reorganising industry, transport, housing and agriculture.

That was certainly the hope of Gaia theorist James Lovelock. He declared: "Humans are too stupid to prevent climate change"; and that "it may be necessary to put democracy on hold for a while" to deal the global ecological emergency.<sup>42</sup> Astrophysicist Lord Martin Rees too: "... only an enlightened despot could push through the measures needed to navigate the 21st century safely".<sup>43</sup> Likewise one of France's leading climatologists, François-Marie Bréon: "We can say that the battle against climate change is in conflict with individual freedoms and therefore with democracy."<sup>44</sup>

Of course, climate socialism, or something like it, would have to happen in all the major countries if the rise in global warming is to be limited to "well below" 2°C. Adding to that little difficulty, the imperial hegemon, the United States, is in visible decline and is, as a result, bent on *destruction* - not the construction that marked out the post-1945 world order. So there is no effective power that can enforce the general good.

Even on a purely national level, we should have no illusions about any eco- or climate socialism being introduced, overseen and enforced by this or that capitalist state (or, for that matter, China's hybrid regime). As with war socialism, if climate socialism happens, there will be stupid blunders, severe restrictions on civil rights, attempts to drive down popular living standards - all accompanied by endemic corruption and corresponding opportunities for well connected insiders to enrich themselves beyond the dreams of Croesus. Nor will such a climate socialism evolve peacefully and smoothly into proletarian socialism. True, we reach a partial negation of capitalist production - the outer limits of capitalist society. But, because there is a swollen, parasitic, aggressively repressive bureaucratic state, what we have is the extreme opposite of proletarian socialism.

Nonetheless, there is a relationship between climate socialism - in reality capitalism attempting to save itself on the back of the working class - and proletarian socialism. After all, in the paragraph above, substitute the firefighter state by the working class organised as the state power. A state based on extreme democracy, closely coordinating with other similar states across the globe, that radically reorganises power generation, industry, agriculture, transport and housing; a state that reduces greenhouse gas emissions to

net zero and then below; a state that subordinates production to need.

Then it is clear that such a state is nothing more than capitalist climate socialism that really does benefit the whole of humanity - and therefore represents the negation of capitalism and the first step towards a classless, moneyless, stateless and ecologically sustainable communism ●

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## USA

# Unholy trinity continues to push

Thanks to the US, Nato and the EU, the Ukraine fallout is spreading, writes Daniel Lazare - not least in Georgia and Slovakia

**W**ar is no fun, especially when you are losing. This is what the capitalist west is discovering as the fallout from the deepening disaster in Ukraine continues to spread.

The effects are most dramatic in Slovakia, Ukraine's neighbour to the west, where a gunman shot and severely wounded prime minister Robert Fico on May 15. Fico is a nationalist who combines vaguely leftist economic and welfare policies with hostility to immigration, liberalism and the military conflict raging on his doorstep. Blaming the war on "Ukrainian Nazis and fascists", he campaigned last fall on a slogan of "Not a single round" for the Kiev government - and won.<sup>1</sup>

The international capitalist class was not pleased. Fico's would-be assassin is a 71-year-old poet and writer named Juraj Cintula, who was spotted chanting "Long live Ukraine" at a demonstration on April 24 and was reportedly incensed when Fico cut off aid to the Kiev regime in January.<sup>2</sup> So it is a case of bullets flying a bit farther afield than expected.

But the results are hardly less extreme some 1,400 miles to the southeast, where tens of thousands of people in ex-Soviet Georgia have taken the streets in nightly protests against a 'Russia law' requiring non-governmental organisations to register if 20% of their funding comes from foreign sources. The pretexts are different, but otherwise the situations are so similar that it is as if the two countries were next-door neighbours. A hypertrophied NGO sector is one factor they have in common, while another is the Ukraine war, which both governments oppose, but opponents support. A third is gay rights, which conservative nationalists see as something the European Union is trying to ram down their throats. A fourth is a deepening split between a pro-EU, pro-Nato capital and a poorer and more conservative countryside - a fissure that runs through Slovak and Georgian politics equally.

In Slovakia, Fico all but predicted his own attempted assassination a month ago, when in a recorded statement he accused the pro-Nato press of going out of its way to "insult government politicians on the street". Anti-government rhetoric was so feverish, he went on, that he was "just waiting for it to lead to the murder of a leading government politician. And I am not exaggerating in the slightest."<sup>3</sup> With Fico's forecast proving all too accurate, his minister of the interior, a lawyer named Matus Sutaj Estok, says the country is now "on the doorstep of a civil war".<sup>4</sup>

In Georgia, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party, was equally apocalyptic in warning last month that his country was the victim of a "global war party" that "only sees Georgia and Ukraine as cannon fodder" and that "non-transparent funding of NGOs is the main tool with which you [ie, Nato and the EU] can appoint the authorities of Georgia from abroad".

Georgians "know the value of one's homeland, its independence and sovereignty", he told a pro-government rally. "Therefore, it is impossible for the ... NGOs to bring about a change of government in Georgia today."<sup>5</sup> The upshot, Ivanishvili said, is not just ordinary political pressure, but a growing push for a *coup d'état*.



Zelenskyy meets troops defending Bakhmut in December 2022: Russia took the city in May 2023

An exaggeration? Hardly, since protestors are themselves making comparisons to the Euromaidan uprising that toppled an elected government in Ukraine in February 2014 and sent the president fleeing for his life. With one opposition MP predicting, "Believe me, there will be a colour revolution in Georgia", the government is taking such threats to heart.<sup>6</sup>

Still, it is hard to see how long the government can hold out, as the Biden administration threatens to impose sanctions and travel restrictions and the EU vows to freeze Georgia's membership application if the NGO registration bill goes through. When imperial policy clashes with local democracy, it is not difficult to figure out who wins.

## Pivoting away

Press coverage has meanwhile been rock-solid in its support for the pro-war side. *The Guardian* - ever attuned to Nato needs - complained last week that the "eccentric" Ivanishvili laces his speech "with anti-western sentiments and conspiracy theories, underscoring the extent the small Caucasian country has pivoted away from the west under Ivanishvili's guidance".<sup>7</sup> 'Pivoting away from the west' can be a capital offence, as Ukrainian events have shown.

After accusing the Georgian police of using "heavy-handed tactics" against protestors, *The New York Times* said that the registration law "mimics a similar measure in Russia" that "quickly developed into a heavy-handed tool to stifle and stigmatize anti-Kremlin advocacy groups and media organizations".<sup>8</sup>

"Heavy-handed"? That is one way of looking at it. Another is to note that just a few weeks after cackling in glee over the death of Muammar Gaddafi - "We came, we saw, he died"<sup>9</sup> - then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton issued an ominous warning to a group of foreign ministers in Vilnius, Lithuania, to the effect that the United States had "serious concern about the conduct of the elections" that had just taken place for the Russian Duma and that a "full investigation" into reports of fraud and intimidation was warranted.

"The Russian people, like people everywhere, deserve the right to have their voices heard and their votes counted," Clinton said. "And that means they deserve free, fair, transparent elections and leaders who are accountable to them."

Did that mean that leaders who are not accountable in Washington's view would face a Gaddafi-like demise? Two years later, under-secretary of state Victoria Nuland, a Clinton protégé, would tell a Washington gathering:

Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, the United States has supported Ukrainians, as they build democratic skills and institutions, as they promote civic participation and good governance, all of which are preconditions for Ukraine to achieve its European aspirations. We've invested over \$5 billion to assist Ukraine in these and other goals that will ensure a secure and prosperous and democratic Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>

With the US investing billions in Russian regime-change, Putin was not being the least bit paranoid as to where it was all leading. Rather than heavy-handed, he was merely being realistic.

So, as shots ring out and protestors battle with police, tensions will continue to build - until western politics crack wide open.

None of which is to suggest that Putin or Fico are good guys or that Ivanishvili - who lives in a glass-and-steel palace high above Tbilisi - is a genuine anti-imperialist. On the contrary, all three are examples of how the ongoing socialist collapse is allowing reactionary forces to fill the void. Rather than a battle between right and left, the upshot in one country after another is an intramural struggle solely within the conservative camp. Euro-Atlanticists are dominant internationally. But with the US in growing crisis from the Ukraine to the western Pacific, local conservatives are invoking national sovereignty in order to raise the drawbridges and keep them out. The results are every bit as rightwing as anything US imperialism has to offer, if not more so.

Hypocrisy meanwhile abounds. The day after Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Georgia Dream prime minister Irakli Garibashvili announced that his country could not possibly join in anti-Russian sanctions because of the damage it would do to the economy - and the risk of sparking a war with Russia even worse than the one Georgia lost in 2008. Georgia gave up 20% of its territory in that episode,

which began when then-president Mikheil Saakashvili, a US favourite, "rained indiscriminate artillery fire on civilian neighbourhoods" in the disputed province of South Ossetia. The upshot was so traumatic - Russian tanks advanced within a half-hour of Tbilisi - that Georgia has no desire to see a repeat.<sup>11</sup>

When Ukraine therefore demanded that Georgia open up a 'second front' against Russia, its response was the same: *nyet*.<sup>12</sup> When the European parliament called for reverse sanctions on Ivanishvili on the grounds that he was personally holding up anti-Moscow measures, Tbilisi dug in its heels. Indeed, Georgia saw a parliamentary revolt by Georgian Dream dissidents demanding an even tougher response to EU interference.

## Hypocrisy

While Georgians overwhelming support EU membership, polls show the opposite in terms of EU military policies. Since 2012, Georgian Dream has won consecutive parliamentary and local elections that outside monitors have deemed competitive, well run and fair. With parliamentary elections scheduled for October, a recent poll put it ahead of the main opposition party by better than three to one.<sup>13</sup> So, no matter how hard the west pushes, the public attitude seems clear. Georgians have no intention of joining the EU in a pointless war in Ukraine. They are not going to jump aboard a sinking ship.

Hypocrisy also abounds with respect to the NGOs. Following independence, Georgia found itself inundated by more than 14,000 NGOs by the end of the 1990s, nearly all of them based in the capital and funded from abroad.<sup>14</sup> Bratislava, a city of around half a million, turned into an NGO boom town, while the rest of the country languished. In a nation in which school teachers and healthcare workers earn less than \$300 per month, entry-level jobs in international NGOs start at \$600 to \$800 and can go as high as \$60,000 or \$70,000 per year - a glittering prize for recent college grads.

To land such jobs, applicants must establish their pro-war, anti-government credentials above all else. The consequence, as a dissident Russian journalist named Vadim Nikitin pointed out in *The Nation*, is a solid wall of anti-government hostility. As the registration act

neared passage, the local branch of Transparency International put out a statement describing the measure as "a betrayal of all our ancestors and compatriots". The leader of an NGO called Gamziri, which bills itself as a "nonpartisan civic platform promoting EU values", tweeted that western powers should "impose heavy sanctions" on Georgian Dream in retaliation.<sup>15</sup>

Can anyone imagine what would happen if Donald Trump tweeted that China or Russia should impose heavy sanctions on the US in response to some White House measure? Democrats, we can safely say, would go ballistic. Indeed, the US had something close to a collective nervous breakdown when a Russian company calling itself the Internet Research Agency shelled out \$46,000 for Facebook ads that *may* have been designed to help Trump win in 2016. (We cannot be sure, since not all of the ads were pro-Trump, while some were not political at all.)<sup>16</sup> Democrats erupted with so much sound and fury that one might have thought that the British were again sailing up the Potomac to put Washington to the torch. 'Russian interference' became the Democratic war cry, a special prosecutor was appointed, and *Russia Today*, the TV outlet now known simply as *RT*, was forced to register as a foreign agent - which is exactly what Georgian Dream wants foreign-funded NGOs to do as well.

Indeed, the EU has unveiled a "defence of democracy package" that - guess what? - would require media companies, political organisations and NGOs to register if they receive foreign funding too.<sup>17</sup>

Double your standards, double your fun - or so the US and its allies apparently believe. The more their military adventures go awry, the more they try to tamp down dissent and force others to fall into line. Politics are exploding as a consequence, not only in Georgia and Slovakia, but elsewhere too. Yet the unholy trinity of the US, EU and Nato continue to push and push, simply because it has no choice ●

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DEBATE

# They are all Palestinians

We should invest our hopes in national uprisings, not working class unity and socialism. Tony Greenstein replies to Moshé Machover

Moshé Machover's article, 'One-state, two-state illusions',<sup>1</sup> interesting though it is, is entirely abstract and has no relationship to what goals the solidarity movement with the Palestinians should be campaigning around.

I also disagree with Moshé's analysis of the different modes of colonisation, which he termed, after Kautsky, "work colonies" and "exploitation colonies". In my view, the main division was between old exploitation colonies - for example, India, Nigeria, Malaya and Iraq - and settler colonies, such as South Africa, Australia, Canada, Palestine and Algeria.

In the former the colonial power, sooner or later, ceded political independence to the indigenous elites, who became a comprador ruling class in alliance with foreign economic interests - often the former colonial power. This was neo-colonialism.

It is the settler-colonial countries that can be divided into exploitation and what I would call exclusionary or exterminatory colonies. Palestine and the Zionist project was very much of the exclusionary kind and this is playing out today both in Gaza and the West Bank.

Moshé says that Israel is different, in that both the settlers and the colonised have formed their own nations unlike other settler-colonial states. But, of course, in the United States, Australia, etc, the settlers have formed their own nations, of sorts, but only with the complete vanquishing of the indigenous population.

It is this - the complete defeat and expulsion of the Palestinians - that has not taken place and it is this that the Zionist state is presently embarking on with support from all wings of Zionism. If Israel does indeed manage to expel the Palestinians from 'Greater Israel' then it is possible that an Israeli nation will form. At the moment it is, at best, a settler nation and as such has no right to national self-determination, because it is the oppressor, not the oppressed.

What holds the so-called Israeli Jewish nation together is not its language or any other cultural or religious attributes, but its common antagonism to the Palestinians. Indeed it is very possible that but for the Palestinians, the Israeli Jewish collective would already be engaged in a civil war, because Israel as a Jewish state is an inherently unstable political formation. If I am correct, then it is one of life's ironies that the only thing holding the Israeli state together is the Palestinians!

Half of Israel is primarily secular and sees being Israeli as its main attribute, with being Jewish a way of defining their supremacist status. The other half - the orthodox and religious nationalists - see being Jewish first and would happily swap civil law for Jewish religious law (*halacha*).

## Settlers

Moshé begins his article by saying that "Winning the Hebrew working class in Israel is vital; so is wider regional change." I agree with the second part, but I disagree with the first. Unfortunately Moshé reverts to a mechanical and economic form of Marxism, which sees the working class in all situations as potentially revolutionary.



Young Haredi Jews: different language, different religion, different economy

Historically a settler working class has never been even a progressive, let alone a revolutionary, force. This was true of the white working class in South Africa, in the deep south of the US, in Algeria and in the north of Ireland with the Protestant working class.

The settler working class in this situation becomes the most *reactionary* class. If it had been left up to the white workers of South Africa, apartheid would still be here today. The Protestant working class of Northern Ireland are the 'bitter enders' - so too in Australia, Canada and the United States. There are reasons why the western working class has been unable to fulfil the historic role that Marx and Engels set out for them in *The communist manifesto* as the grave-diggers of capitalism.

Imperialism, reformism, the mystification of class relations and the domination of the mass media have resulted, more often than not, in a depoliticisation of the working class. But at least British and European workers have created their own independent trade unions.

Even this was not possible for Israeli Jewish workers, whose trade union, Histadrut, was set up in opposition to existing joint Arab-Israeli unions. It was, at one and the same time, the state's second largest employer (until its enterprises went bankrupt in the late 80s!). Israeli Jewish workers have never created their own political party, such as the now hopelessly deformed British Labour Party.

The idea that in the right circumstances a working class which is on the right of Israel's far-right politics and where socialist ideas are almost absent will become part of anti-Zionist change is simply wishful thinking. Whatever they are offered, they will demand more. What then are our tasks?

As I said at the beginning, this should not be a paper or abstract exercise. We should start from what should be the demands of the solidarity movement. What happens in Palestine and the Arab east itself is largely beyond our control, except in

so far as we can put enough pressure on our own ruling classes to stop funding, arming and supporting the Israeli state and its genocidaires.

## Two or one?

There is nothing I disagree with in what Moshé says about the so-called two-state solution other than that it is an apartheid, neo-colonial 'solution'. It simply aims to solve the Palestinian question by having Palestinians repress other Palestinians. That was the Oslo 'solution' too, but now Israel feels no need to sustain even the quisling Palestinian Authority.

About the one-state solution we do disagree. About how it is to be achieved and what form it will take are secondary questions, albeit very important. But, given that we have limited agency in respect of this and because solidarity with the oppressed is our main concern, it is important that we are clear on why it is important for the solidarity movement in the west to make this their primary concern in all their propaganda.

Quite simply our main purpose in the west is to go beyond the human-rights narrative, important though that is, of course. For all the liberal and reformist supporters of the Palestinians the question of human rights is *the* question, but to socialists and anti-Zionists it is secondary.

Our task is, above all, to delegitimise Israel as a 'Jewish state'. We should assert that *any* ethno-religious state will, by definition, be a racist, apartheid state. It can be no other. If you define the national collective in terms of religion, then anyone not part of that collective will be, by definition, not even a second-class citizen. They will be a guest, there on sufferance.

It is no accident that Israel specifically forbids Palestinians converting to Judaism because, if Palestinians could change their status as the *Untermenschen*, then it might catch on.<sup>2</sup> It would be too easy for the oppressed to join the ranks of the oppressor. There is no religious basis for excluding any group of people from converting to Judaism: it is a product of Zionist racism and

Jewish racial supremacy.

We should be very clear in our slogans that we stand for a democratic state, not a Jewish state. If anti-Zionism means anything, it means opposing a Jewish supremacist state and supporting one secular and democratic state.

Of course, there will then be arguments over what exactly this means and I agree with Moshé that there must be equal rights for all, including equal personal rights. Where we disagree is over Moshé's formulation that "secondly and importantly", there must be "equal national rights for both groups involved". This would allow the reintroduction through the back door of Jewish supremacy and Zionism. It would be a recipe for future conflict, not a resolution of the question.

Moshé has difficulty in reconciling the conflicting elements of his own analysis. On the one hand, he says correctly that the conflict at heart was not a national conflict between Jews and Arabs, but a question of settler-colonialism; and then he says that recognition of the national rights of Israeli Jews is a precondition for any solution. The two do not add up (although today they are relatively unimportant). Yes, of course, there should be recognition of Hebrew as a language equal in status to Arabic. Freedom of religion, which does not exist today in Israel, should be guaranteed, but nothing that could lead to the reestablishment of Zionism and Jewish supremacy should form part of a resolution of the national question, because at heart Israeli Jews are, *whether they like it or not*, Jewish Palestinians. That is the price that South African whites had to pay when they finally gave up on apartheid. They too had to join the indigenous population.

## Beginning of end

Of course, this is all in the future. However, that future may not be as far off as some people imagine. Even by its own standards Zionism is becoming so overtly racist and genocidal that politically it is becoming more and more difficult for the west to support it.

How the end will come about can only be a matter of speculation. What is clear is that the myth of Israeli invincibility is gone. October 7 proved that. The surprise attack that sliced through Israeli defences like a knife through butter was a real shock to the Israeli psyche. The horror stories that came after were part of the healing process. After all, the Palestinians were only savages.

The moving of two American aircraft carriers into the Mediterranean as a warning to Hezbollah emphasised that Israel was having to rely on the United States, as is the case with the resupply of weaponry to Israeli forces in Gaza. So too the provision of intelligence by Britain and the US and the fact that Britain, France and the US also have special forces on the ground.

Hezbollah has also conducted its own border war against Israel without the kind of reaction that might have been expected 20 years ago, despite the fact that the northern settlements have had to be abandoned. Clearly Israel is deterred by the threat of Hezbollah's arsenal of missiles.

Above all, Israel has become bogged down in Gaza itself. Despite the genocide and the horrific attacks on civilian infrastructure, Israel's

military have not been able to defeat Hamas and the resistance, which has conducted a classic guerrilla-style war. Israel has clearly suffered far more casualties, both in Gaza and in the conflict with Hezbollah, than they are admitting. That much became clear when *Ha'aretz* investigated casualties in each of Israel's hospitals and found the number of wounded at just one hospital had exceeded the total number that the Israel Defence Forces had released overall.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that the fighting is a lot more intense than the western media reports and that casualties are a lot higher.<sup>4</sup>

The geopolitical equation is changing and not to Israel's advantage. The fact is that, despite the sanctions and isolation of Iran, it has grown stronger, with proxies like the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Normalisation and the Abraham Accords were meant to change that, but they have not. Despite the abject capitulation and treachery by the US client regimes in the Gulf and elsewhere, the Israeli state is still unable to establish the hegemony it desires.

Moshé states that the overthrow of Zionism "cannot possibly be resolved under capitalism", but he also says, "I think this is unlikely" - betraying a certain element of doubt. The fact is that capitalism has not been abolished anywhere in the world. Are we saying that the liberation of the Palestinians has to wait until the ends of time?

Although I have no crystal ball, I do have faith that, where the Arab Spring failed, future national uprisings may well sweep away the autocrats and dictators in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other states. Zionism, whose whole purpose is to act as a watchdog in the Middle East, may find itself drawn into battles that it cannot win and which drain its strength. It is perfectly possible that, weakened from the inside as well as the outside, the Zionist regime will give way and, as the political price of supporting it increases, western states too will distance themselves.

The strong always seem strong when we are on our knees. The United States today also seems invincible, but if I were on its National Security Council I would be worried. Israel, the unsinkable aircraft carrier, needed our support. China has not been isolated despite Aukus. The dollar is under permanent threat because of the spiralling deficit. Within the United States democratic movements, such as the students and Black Lives Matter, challenge the legitimacy of the state. In Ukraine, despite billions of dollars being poured into Nato's proxy war, Russia is increasingly winning.

That is why I agree with Ilan Pappé that what we are seeing is the beginning of the end of Zionism and not the end of the beginning ●

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**GAZA**

# Genocide by starvation

Israel's war cabinet is split over plans for Gaza: military occupation or an international civil administration? Meanwhile, **Eddie Ford** condemns the ICC for drawing a moral equivalence between Hamas and Israel

As the Gaza war continues with no obvious end in sight, the tensions within Israeli politics and wider society have been reflected in the widely reported split inside the war cabinet. Actually, the cabinet is very small, consisting of just three members and three observers. The voting members are Benjamin Netanyahu, of course, plus Yoav Gallant, the defence minister, and Benny Gantz, a retired general and now minister without portfolio.

Gantz, who is at the centre of the split, is the founder and leader of Israeli Resilience - which later allied itself with Telem and Yesh Atid to form Blue and White (the colours of the Israeli national flag) that came equal first with Likud in the April 2019 legislative elections - but conceded defeat - and the following year came second, with 33 seats to Likud's 36. In 2022, Gantz became the leader of National Unity, made up of Israel Resilience and New Hope. Gantz and the two other war cabinet members could hardly be described as friends or allies either - more like 'frenemies'.

Indeed, Yair Lapid, a former prime minister and leader of Yesh Atid - the official opposition party - claimed that Netanyahu and Gallant were no longer speaking to one another, and that war cabinet meetings had become "a shameful arena for settling scores, fighting and discussions that lead nowhere". As for the observers, one is an 'independent' very close to Netanyahu, another is from National Unity and the third represents the religious party, Shas - the fourth-largest party in the Knesset that since 1984 has been part of most governing coalitions.

## Demands

During a press conference last week, Gantz threatened to resign on June 8 if his six-point plan for post-war governance of Gaza is not approved, which could lead to the collapse of the government and possibly bring down Netanyahu himself. His demands include demilitarisation in Gaza and the establishment of a joint US, European, Arab and Palestinian civilian administration that will run the territory - which seems very unlikely to happen - and the return of the hostages. For months now, Netanyahu has dodged the question of what will come after the war, saying instead that Israel must focus on "destroying Hamas" - meaning that he has no incentive to end the war, as 'peace', however defined, will bring some sort of official reckoning over his many political, military and intelligence failures. Maybe he will end up in jail. For his part, Gallant has talked about how Gaza "won't return to what it was before" - Hamas "won't be there", because Israel "will eliminate everything". The Palestinians, after all, are just "human animals".

However, what this open split is really about can be condensed into one question: is Israel prepared for an indefinite *military* occupation of Gaza? People who object to that idea are not only the 2.5 million Gazans, naturally enough, but the security apparatus as well. They say if they have to occupy a hostile Gaza, which is what it will be, this will cost military lives and tie up a significant part of the army that could be better deployed on the West Bank and in the north of the country against Hezbollah. Much better, they



## Premature babies in Gaza: Israel is withholding medicine and food

argue, to have something like the Palestinian Authority that at present administers at least parts of the West Bank.

Then, when we come to the actual coalition government in Israel (the country nowadays has nothing but coalition governments of widely disparate forces), there is the far right, which says that Israel should not only occupy parts of the Gaza Strip, but actually slowly *colonise* it like the West Bank since 1967. True, in the past there was a handful of settlements, but it was never a serious site of colonisation. In 2005 Israel disbanded its Gaza settlements. However, that was never to the liking of the far right, and with October 7 there are all sorts of plans being made for the completion of a Greater Israel. Of course, incorporating the Gaza Strip seems a complete non-starter, as long as there are 2.5 million hostile Palestinians living there - but perhaps that inconvenience can be removed!

Exactly how Netanyahu will react to Gantz's challenge is difficult to predict - will he call his bluff? Ignore him? Make concessions? However, one thing you can say with conviction is that the very nature of the Zionist project - which does not include just the far right, but also Labor Zionism - means it is *pre-programmed* for ethnic cleansing, as the Palestinian people represent a permanent threat to the existence of the 'Jewish state'. Such a possibility should therefore not be discounted. After all, why has Israel seized the Rafah crossing? It might not be simply to control the food, water and medical supplies coming into the Gaza Strip, but to use it to create another *Nakba* as in 1947-48.

Meanwhile, the US has announced the opening of its \$320 million pier off the coast of Gaza, intended to bring in supplies. From there, the intention is that 90 truckloads of international aid will be brought into Gaza each day, eventually building up - so we are told - to 150 truckloads a day.

The problems are obvious. The aid is formally handed to the World Food Programme and other such agencies

on the coast, but it is unclear how it will be distributed around Gaza, as it will have to pass through thousands of Palestinians desperate to get their hands on any food they can - and then there are the Israeli checkpoints. As of writing, the Pentagon reports that no US-aid has been parcelled out to humanitarian organisations.

It is clear what Israel's war cabinet is doing: using food as a weapon. It has been blocking convoys coming in from Israel and Egypt, and the US pier will be no different. Even if it actually delivers 150 trucks of aid a day, which is very doubtful, it is a drop in the ocean, compared to the norm pre-October 7, when Gaza was receiving 500 a day. And, given the near complete destruction of large parts of Gaza, in order to stave off starvation and mass disease, at least 1,000 trucks a day are needed. You can only come to the conclusion that the pier is an example of US tokenism in the run-up to November's presidential election (Biden needs all the American-Arab and American-Muslim votes he can get).

No wonder the United Nations' humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths, has warned of "apocalyptic" consequences due to the chronic shortages of aid. He states that that deliveries of food and fuel had slowed to "dangerously low levels" - and the US pier can never act as a replacement for the land routes. Indeed, on May 21 the UN suspended food distribution in Rafah due to lack of supplies coming from Egypt and security concerns. In other words, humanitarian operations in Gaza are near total collapse and if supplies do not immediately resume in massive quantities, famine will take a grip.

The situation could not be any worse - an entire population starving to death if they are not struck down by disease first. If this is not intended genocide, then what is?

In this context, at the beginning of the week the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court, Karim Khan, announced he was requesting arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant. Khan is also seeking the arrest of three leading Hamas figures over the

October 7 attacks. At the same time, a separate case is currently being heard by the International Court of Justice, over the charge - brought by South Africa - that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

## Complicit Joe

The US reaction was totally predictable, with Joe Biden - well earning his nickname of 'Genocide Joe' - attacking the ICC's judgement as "outrageous" and accusing it of making a "false moral equivalence" between Israel and Hamas. The US president declared that he "will always ensure that Israel has everything it needs to defend itself against Hamas and all its enemies". In the same vein, Antony Blinken, the secretary of state, said that

the US "fundamentally rejects" the decision to seek the arrest of Israeli officials - also warning that it could jeopardise efforts to reach a ceasefire, such as they are. If anything, Netanyahu's response was even more predictable and grotesque. After raving about how the ICC's decision means that Israel is unable to defend itself, he reached for the old copy book - accusing Khan of "callously pouring gasoline on the fires of anti-Semitism that are raging across the world" and madly claiming that the ICC prosecutor "takes his place among the great anti-Semites in modern times". Well, at least Adolf Hitler will be in good company.

Actually, the CPGB too thinks that the ICC is guilty of drawing a "false equivalence" - Israel is an ongoing settler-colonial project now backed to the hilt by the US global hegemon. What about Hamas? Of course, it is a reactionary organisation, its origins lying in the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. But it is also a popular organisation, coming top in the last Palestinian elections. And, whereas the Palestine Liberation Organisation has chosen the path of collaboration with the occupying Zionist state, Hamas has actively engaged in resistance.

True, that resistance has often been crude, brutal and misguided - eg, suicide bombers and, of course, October 7. The same can be said of national resistance movements elsewhere such as the Mau Mau in Kenya. But we have to distinguish between the violence of the oppressors and the violence of the oppressed. To fail to make that distinction, to evade that distinction, is to peddle on-the-one-hand-this and one-the-other-hand-that legalism, which equates the violence of a would-be murderer and the violence of the would-be victim. That we shall never do ●

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## Fighting fund

# Keep it coming!

As expected, the third week of May produced the usual boost for the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund in the shape of those three-figure donations that always come our way this time of the month. Thank you very much indeed, comrades KB, GB, PM and SK!

On top of that there was the excellent £75 from MM, plus £40 from TR, £35 from SO, £20 from DR, £15 from SS and £3 from DS. Those were all either standing orders or one-off bank transfers, but, unlike last week, we received no PayPal donations at all! But we did get the usual £5 note from comrade Hassan, plus another £5 from participants at last weekend's Palestine demonstration.

So altogether we ended the week £784 better off than we were when it started! And that means our running total for the month stands at £1,640 towards our £2,250 target after (as I write) 22 days. In other words, we still need another £610 in

nine days, and - if the last seven are anything to go by - we can definitely do it!

But I don't take anything for granted. As well as those standing orders and monthly PayPal contributions, we need other readers to do their bit. So can you help us out? There's still time to send us a cheque - or you can help us more speedily by making a bank transfer or using PayPal. For more details of how to donate, please go to the web address below.

With your help we can definitely reach that target - which means that the *Weekly Worker* can continue to play its vital role in fighting for the kind of party the working class needs so badly. You know what to do! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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## IRAN

# Your next president will be

Winning in June depends on who the supreme leader favours. **Yassamine Mather** also says that being elected president can amount to a poisoned chalice

Following the helicopter crash on May 19 in which he was killed, ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi's life has been much covered by the world's media. But what strikes me is the hypocrisy over the Iranian president's role as the 'hanging judge'. Families of leftwing political prisoners executed in 1988 have seen his signature on the death sentences issued to their relatives.

In 1988, as these mass executions were taking place, comrade Torab Saleth (formerly of the Fourth International) and I did what we could to draw attention to the horrific events. Virtually no-one in the UK media was interested. With the Iraq-Iraq war just ended, and the UK government looking forward to lucrative economic deals with the Islamic Republic, no-one cared about leftwing political prisoners being butchered. Amongst politicians, the only MP who agreed to see us was Jeremy Corbyn, who listened to us for more than an hour - and the next week used a parliamentary session to raise the issue. However, now that the Islamic Republic is enemy number one, every obituary of Raisi mentions his role during that period. Hypocrisy indeed!

### Fall from grace

But his death has been significant in another sense. BBC Persian reminded us this week that almost all of Iran's heads of state since 1979 eventually fell from grace and faced isolation, exile and even death. It is worth reminding ourselves about that phenomenon.

Mehdi Bazargan: the first (temporary) prime minister after the revolution had complaints about his status and lack of power from his very first days in office. At the time the country had no president, so Bazargan was head of state, yet power was in the hand of the first supreme leader of the Islamic Republic, ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Bazargan resigned when he faced political obstacles, especially as he was completely sidelined during the November 1979 occupation of the American embassy in Tehran.

Abolhassan Banisadr: after Bazargan's departure, Khomeini sought the presidency of a layman and trusted ally, who won the election with more than 75% of the votes. His way of managing war affairs and his opposition to the prime minister imposed on him caused much confrontation and conflict. He emphasised the role of the army, while others wanted a greater role for the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC).

The majlis (Iran's parliament) impeached Banisadr in his absence in June 1981, allegedly because of his moves against the clerics in power (Khomeini himself appears to have instigated the impeachment). Facing death threats, Banisadr fled the country and sought asylum in France.

Mohammad-Ali Rajai: following the dismissal of Banisadr, Rajai was elected president in August 1981. However, his presidency lasted only a few weeks, as he was killed on September 8 in an explosion that also took the life of his prime minister (the People's Mojahedin Organisation was accused of responsibility for this attack).

Ali Khamenei: he was then elected as the third president of the Islamic Republic in October 1981. He put forward Ali Akbar Velayati as his prime minister, but the Iranian parliament refused Velayati a vote of



Ebrahim Raisi campaigning in April 2017

confidence, and Khamenei agreed to a compromise by offering Mir Hossein Moussavi the premiership, despite strong disagreements with him.

Their tense relationship eventually led to the resignation of Moussavi however. In 1989, the revision of the constitution removed the position of prime minister and Moussavi withdrew from politics for 20 years. (In 2008, he joined the presidential race and he and his supporters claim he won that year's election. However, the supreme leader sided with his opponent and as a result of this confrontation, which led to the mass Green Movement protests, Moussavi was arrested in February 2009. He has been under house arrest since 2011.)

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani: became president after winning the 1989 election, and served another term by winning again in 1993. In the 2005 election, he ran for a third term in office, finishing in front in the first round of elections, but ultimately losing to rival Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the run-off.

Rafsanjani was in favour of a capitalist free market domestically, supporting the privatisation of state-owned industries, and internationally he was regarded as a 'moderate', seeking to avoid conflict with the US and the west. He and his family accumulated huge wealth inside and outside Iran during his time in office. According to Iranian officials, he had a heart attack while swimming in his private gym in January 2017, while some of his relatives claim he was actually killed by the Islamic regime.

Mohammad Khatami: he served as president from August 1997 to August 2005. A social reformist with strong support from youth, women and intellectuals, he was elected by almost 70% of voters. However, from the very first months, signs of tension were evident in the upper layers of the government. Khatami later said that his government faced a crisis "once every nine days".

After the protests that raged in 2007, the publication of his picture in the media inside Iran was forbidden, and the Fars news agency announced that he was banned from leaving the country.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: became president in 2005. From messages attributed to ayatollah Khamenei and the clerics close to him, it was understood that the supreme leader had found the most desirable person close to him for the presidency. But this political union did not last long.

Very soon after his election, he appointed Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei as the first deputy, and Khamenei said in a private letter that he did not consider such a choice expedient. Ahmadinejad was out of favour since then and was told by those close to

the supreme leader not to enter the next presidential contest.

Hassan Rouhani: his election in 2013 was interpreted by many as a "nuclear referendum". However, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement, which stipulated that Iran's nuclear programme would be entirely peaceful, became a source of tension between him and Iran's supreme leader after then US president Donald Trump reneged on the agreement. Rouhani and his foreign minister tried to reopen negotiations with the US and EU, but they were openly criticised by the supreme leader.

During his presidency, many accusations of corruption were raised against him and his close relatives. In 2024 he was barred from participating in elections for membership of the Assembly of Experts.

### Reaction

What about the other victims of the helicopter crash? Less has been written about foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

During his career, he was close to Iran's Revolutionary Guards. This allowed him to have direct links with Iran's regional allies - what are wrongly labelled as Iranian proxy groups (I have written and spoken previously about the complicated relations between Iran and these organisations and states).

Both Raisi and Abdollahian are now hailed as 'martyrs', although I am not quite sure how the result of the accident of a helicopter returning from the opening of a dam can be considered as dying in the cause of religion. But, like everything else in the Islamic Republic nowadays, we have pragmatic interpretations of what constitutes martyrdom.

In the British media, there were contradictory reports about the reaction to these deaths. While the exiled opposition openly celebrated, inside Iran things were more mixed. On social media there were images and short videos of fireworks and celebrations, but Raisi was popular in some smaller towns and the countryside partly because of the subsidies he approved in 2021.

A large crowd of regime supporters did gather for the mourning procession in Tabriz on May 21, but it was nowhere near the five million predicted by the academic who serves as the unofficial spokesperson for the Islamic Republic, professor Mohammad Marandi.

It should be added that the Tabriz Friday Prayer leader, Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, who was also killed in the incident, was popular. He was a leader of the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, after winning 834,108

votes - amongst the highest ever in East Azerbaijan province, for which he was the representative.

Most Iranians are aware that Raisi's death will have little effect in terms of politics or the economy. Repression will remain, and the supreme leader will continue his dictatorial rule with no tolerance of any dissent, at a time when the dire economic situation has impoverished the majority of the population, while at the same time corruption has created astronomical wealth for a small minority associated with the ruling circles.

According to the constitution of the Islamic Republic, in the event of the death of the president, his first deputy,

with the approval of the leadership, assumes his powers and responsibilities, and a council consisting of the speaker of the Majlis, the head of the judiciary and the first vice-president are obliged to arrange for a new president to be elected within a maximum period of 50 days.

That means Mohammad Mokhber Dezfuli. Before becoming the first deputy of Ebrahim Raisi, he was for nearly 15 years head of the 'Farman e Imam', one of the richest economic groups in the Islamic Republic. Farman e Imam operates directly under the supervision of the leader of the Islamic Republic and is not accountable to any institution.

Dezfuli as first vice-president of Iran took over the role of organising Iran's economy, although the evidence shows that he did not have a successful record. He is likely to be a candidate and front runner in the forthcoming presidential elections (June 28). After the Iran-Iraq war he became the CEO of the Dezful Telecommunication Company in Khuzestan province, where he was deputy governor for a period.

Later he moved to Tehran and assumed important positions, such as the deputy of transportation and commerce of the foundation for the dispossessed (*Bonyad Mostazafan*). He has also been the chair of the board of directors of Sina Bank, which operates under the supervision of the Mostazafan Foundation.

But the most decisive leap of Dezfuli occurred when Ali Khamenei appointed him head of the executive of Farman e Imam in July 2006. This conglomerate was established on the orders of Ruhollah Khomeini one month before his death. It was responsible for the management of the property at the disposal of the leader of the Islamic Republic, including what was confiscated after the 1979 revolution.

Of course, Dezfuli's chances of winning in June depends on who the supreme leader favours for the post. The remaining key candidate is Mojtaba Khamenei, the supreme leader's son, who is also a conservative cleric with a background in the Revolutionary Guards. Despite his extensive experience behind the scenes, his limited public and international profile is viewed by some as a disadvantage.

Nevertheless, conspiracy theorists claim the helicopter crash was no accident. They blame Mojtaba Khamenei and his supporters in the Revolutionary Guards. ●

### Notes

1. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r\\_v4y6RvK78](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_v4y6RvK78).

## What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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# weekly worker

Endless delay  
is built  
into system

## Blood of the innocents

Sir Brian Langstaff's Infected Blood Inquiry reveals a disgraceful litany of deceit, delay, neglect and corporate greed, writes Ian Spencer

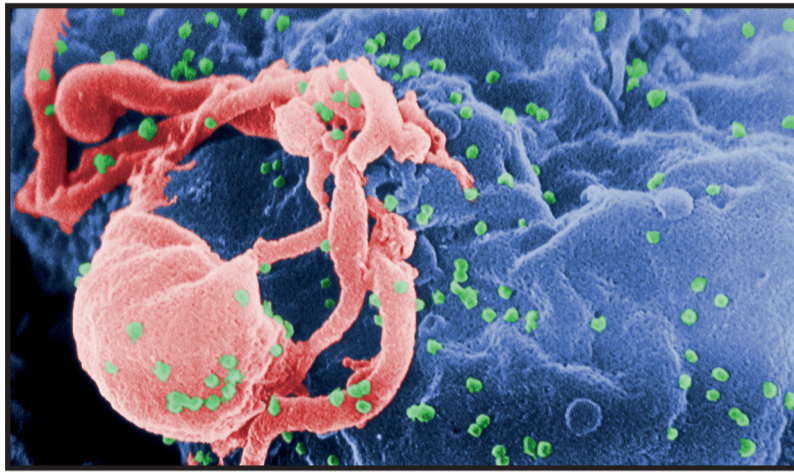
The publication on May 20 of the report of the Infected Blood Inquiry has been a long time coming. The inquiry was initiated by prime minister Theresa May in 2017, during which time hundreds have died without seeing justice done. Even then, it was only decided to launch a public inquiry in response to action on behalf of 500 haemophiliacs.

A cynic might suggest that public inquiries in the UK have become a way of ensuring compensation payments are delayed until enough people have died to make the whole charade feasible. It certainly ensures that those who bear full responsibility for the cover-up are either dead or safely retired, often with comfortable pensions. And, of course, it does not address the real culprits at all, such as the US company, Bayer and Baxter International, which made vast profits by extracting contaminated blood from the poorest in society, who had little choice but to sell it.<sup>1</sup> The period in which people were infected with hepatitis and HIV, particularly the late 1970s and 1980s, was also a time in which these diseases were treated by many in power as a moral judgement or, at best, with blithe indifference to what happened to thousands of people.

Rishi Sunak has made a "wholehearted and unequivocal apology" for the delay in establishing the inquiry and paying compensation, among the catalogue of other failings. However, he did not apologise for his role in using a three-line-whip which tried to block an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill that established a compensation scheme in December 2023.<sup>2</sup>

The unconscionable delay is in stark contrast with other countries. France, for example, made 15,542 compensation offers to victims and their families between 1992 and 1998, and Dr M Garetta, director of the National Blood Centre of France, was sentenced to four years in prison. Canada announced a \$150 million package in 1989 for those who had contracted HIV from contaminated blood. A decade later it pledged a further \$1.2 billion.<sup>3</sup>

One important outcome of the inquiry is the establishment of the Infected Blood Compensation Authority, which will administer the scheme. A table of likely figures for compensation has been belatedly drawn up and will apply to victims themselves, relatives and the estates of those who have already died. The compensation figures will range from £35,000 for acute hepatitis C to £2,735,000 for HIV with hepatitis, which has already led to liver cancer or a transplantation.<sup>4</sup> There will be interim payments of up to £210,000. It is estimated that the total bill for compensation will be approximately £10 billion. Most of this will be funded by public-sector borrowing and from the annually managed expenditure of the department of health. In other words, the pharmaceutical industry,



Electron microscope picture of HIV

which has been at the heart of the scandal, will once again be subject to the privatisation of profit and the nationalisation of liability.

The Infected Blood Inquiry statistics report, published in September 2022, established that approximately 26,800 people were infected with Hepatitis C (HCV) after a blood transfusion, often linked with childbirth or surgery. HCV and Hepatitis B (HBV) can both result in long-term liver damage, leading in some cases to cirrhosis and cancer. In the period covered by the report there were around 4,000-6,000 people with bleeding disorders at any one time. Approximately 1,250 were infected with HIV, including 380 children, and almost all those with HIV were also infected with HCV. Three quarters have died. Between 2,400 and 5,000 people who did not have HIV were infected by one hepatitis virus or another and developed chronic liver disease. About 3,000 people have died as a direct consequence of infected blood and blood products and a further 3,000 today are still suffering long-term, life-limiting, illness. Almost all of which could have been avoided, had timely warnings been heeded.

### Failures

Sir Brian Langstaff's report is unequivocal and a masterpiece of lucid reporting. He says:

I have to report a catalogue of failures which caused this to happen. Each on its own is serious. Taken together, they are a calamity. Lord Winston famously called these events "the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS". I have to report that it could largely, although not entirely, have been avoided. And I have to report that it should have been.

I also have to report systemic, collective and individual failures to deal ethically, appropriately and quickly with the risk of infections being transmitted in blood, with the infections when the risk materialised, and with the consequences for thousands of families.<sup>5</sup>

From the mid-1940s it was beyond doubt that blood transfusions could cause 'serum hepatitis' and that this could be fatal or lead to long-term disease, liver failure, cirrhosis and cancer. The virus responsible for Hepatitis B was identified in the early 1970s. It was known by the mid-70s that a 'non-A, non-B virus' was transmissible by transfusion and had similar long-term consequences, identified as HCV in 1988.

### Prisoners

As early as 1974, warnings about the dangers of using pooled plasma from numerous donors - particularly those where it had been harvested from prisoners and intravenous drug users - were given by Dr Judith Graham Poole, who had already developed a safe alternative, cryoprecipitate. It was well recognised that blood donated voluntarily by healthy, unpaid donors was far safer than commercially sourced blood or blood harvested from unfree populations. Blood donations were taken from UK and US prisons throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. By mid-1982 it was well known that whatever was causing Aids was transmissible by blood and blood products.

The report highlights how successive governments - Labour and the Tory-Lib Dem coalition - contributed to the catastrophe. This included failing to appreciate the risks from imported blood products, failing to tell people about such risks, failing to ensure that the UK was self-sufficient in plasma to treat haemophiliacs, which was a direct consequence of a failure to invest in what was then a state-owned facility making safe blood products. There were also clear efforts to cover up errors of commission and omission, including the loss and deliberate destruction of records relating to the scandal.

The government is also charged with failing to take action to make donated blood safer by eliminating risky donations, failing to implement heat activation of the virus and screening in a timely manner, failing to communicate the value of using less risky alternatives to blood transfusion, failing to understand and tell people that HIV was transmissible

by transfusion and, above all, wilfully using known contaminated blood products when there were safer alternatives. As late as September 1983 the Conservative government's official position was stated by then health secretary Kenneth Clarke: "It has been suggested that Aids may be transmitted in blood or blood products. There is no conclusive proof that this is so." This is a line which continued to be reported well into 1984 - a position which the report describes as "indefensible".

It also highlights the part played by cosy relationships between pharmaceutical companies and haemophilia centre clinicians: sometimes gifts were provided, sometimes there was sponsorship or funding for research, funding to attend international conferences, and extravagant hospitality was provided to gain influence for commercial blood products:

At this distance of time, and where the clinicians most prominently associated with pharmaceutical companies (such as Professor Bloom, Dr Kernoff, Dr Aronstam, and Professor Savidge) are dead, it is no longer possible to determine what impact these relationships and these offers of funding had on clinical decision making. But if clinicians accepted funding (whether for hospitality or attending conferences, or research) it was all the more incumbent on them to ensure that their clinical recommendations and the risks and benefits of treatment were fully explained to their patients. As this report finds, the failure to do so was widespread and profound.<sup>6</sup>

### Pernicious

The report consists of seven volumes. Volume 2 is devoted to the personal stories and case studies of those who have suffered directly. All these accounts are heart-breaking, but perhaps one of the most poignant was the use of Treloar School and College - a residential and day special school for disabled children, where Dr Anthony Aronstam was, from 1977, responsible for the treatment programme of haemophiliac children and conducting research.

His failure to inform children or their relatives of the risk of the treatments or research and the fact that he "did little to reduce the risk of Aids" and "did not even tell others about the risk until it became inescapable" is highlighted by the report. While it may seem invidious to single out one doctor, when so many others are named for the pernicious role they played, it is, I think, symbolic of the way in which the infected blood scandal is a damning indictment of British society in general. The poor, disabled, those suffering stigmatised illnesses such as hepatitis and Aids are all treated very differently to the rich and powerful, who are protected and protect one another.

For example, in December 1986, the then chief constable of Greater Manchester, Sir James Anderton, remarked that homosexuals, drug addicts and prostitutes who had HIV/Aids were "swirling in a human cesspit of their own making". His comments were not untypical of the time, conveying an attitude of 'innocent' and 'guilty' victims of disease and hostility to the poor, which is often expressed in moral terms. It was a period in which insecurity in the ruling class manifested in a series of incidents, which have subsequently found their expression in public inquiries.

The Bloody Sunday Inquiry was the final realisation of the truth of the atrocity perpetrated by the British Army in 1972, after numerous attempts to whitewash the events. The Hillsborough disaster, in 1989, in which the police were not held to account for their actions until the Hillsborough Independent Panel, instituted in 2009, finally issued its report in 2012. For much of the 1980s the actions of the police, so prominent in helping to crush the miners' strike, were regarded as untouchable.

The infected blood scandal may have been in part a reflection of its time, but the process goes on unabated: the Post Office scandal, currently the subject of a public inquiry, in which sub-postmasters were made to pay the price for those with so much to gain from privatising the Post Office - Fujitsu is unlikely ever to be held to account for destroying so many people's lives. The Grenfell Tower inquiry, instituted by Theresa May in September 2017, has been going on for almost as long as the Infected Blood Inquiry and again is concerned with the deaths of the poor and marginal and is therefore unlikely to ever hold to account those who were responsible for the dangerous cladding of tower blocks.

The Infected Blood Inquiry report has 12 main recommendations and many sub-clauses to each one. They range from at last giving the recipients of infected blood something like the compensation they should have received years ago to "giving patients a voice" and "ending a defensive culture in the civil service and government".

Laudable, I am sure, but unlikely to be realised while the civil service and government are dedicated to protecting the interests of precisely the people who were ultimately responsible for the disaster and who may never be held to account ●

### Notes

1. [www.ft.com/content/5bb83877-684e-4b6a-9b32-0f0be7696fde](http://www.ft.com/content/5bb83877-684e-4b6a-9b32-0f0be7696fde).
2. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-67615379](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-67615379).
3. [www.ft.com/content/5bb83877-684e-4b6a-9b32-0f0be7696fde](http://www.ft.com/content/5bb83877-684e-4b6a-9b32-0f0be7696fde).
4. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/infected-blood-compensation-scheme-summary/infected-blood-compensation-scheme-summary](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infected-blood-compensation-scheme-summary/infected-blood-compensation-scheme-summary).
5. [www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/sites/default/files/Volume-1.pdf](http://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/sites/default/files/Volume-1.pdf).
6. *Ibid.*